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No Walls in Eden: Architecture in Twentieth-Century Fiction

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by

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Abstract

This thesis offers a range of novels and short stories as evidence that architecture, in twentieth-century fiction, is interrogated with a peculiar intensity. In these texts walls are untrustworthy, and access problematic; and as a result rooms are anxiously sealed, unsealed and re-sealed, and wallpaper pattern, graffiti, even marks on paintwork, endlessly deciphered. Alternately alarmed and excited by the modernist project to cast off the encumbrances of previous centuries, the twentieth-century protagonist seems to suffer from a range of spatial phobias, which is reflected in his relationship with architecture. The thesis considers these, and also identifies an alternative literary type – an heir, perhaps, to the nineteenth-century *flâneur* – who copes better with architectural permeability and is, therefore, better adapted to the modern world. In addition to investigating the figurative significance of architecture, the thesis explores and evaluates the discursive interplay between text and architecture, both within twentieth-century fiction, and between fiction and seminal works of architectural theory.

The first and last chapters focus on marriage and domestic architecture in texts by Edith Wharton, Mona Caird, Thomas Hardy, Chuck Palahniuk and Mark Z. Danielewski. The second and fourth chapters consider the man (or woman), alone in a room, in texts by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Henri Barbusse, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Elizabeth Bowen, Albert Camus and Alain Robbe-Grillet; and enquire whether his sedentary stance is endorsed by the texts. The third chapter analyses two politically antithetical texts by Ayn Rand and Ann Petry, in which a protagonist struggles to find the point of equilibrium between self and world. The fifth chapter focuses on texts by J.G. Ballard and Doris Lessing with a view to pursuing a proposition, raised in Chapter 4, that post-war authors are using architecture as a figure through which to interrogate the inside/outside dichotomy. The final chapter continues to explore this issue, and also considers walls and skin as related tropes in late twentieth-century fiction.

Contents

Introduction

This thesis will offer a range of novels and short stories as evidence that twentieth-century fiction is peculiarly preoccupied with walls and their trimmings – doors and windows, wallpaper and paint, wall cavities, and the wires, pipework and insulation with which they are packed – and also with rooms and their contents. It will then closely analyse these texts with a view to establishing what it is about architecture that so captivates the twentieth-century literary imagination. The texts selected are examples of fiction in which architecture plays a particularly prominent part, and in which structure and surface are scrutinised with particular fanaticism. It is intended to be a representative selection, however, and the thesis will draw, throughout, on extracts from other twentieth-century works that display a marked architectural orientation. I start from the position that twentieth-century modernism and postmodernism were trans-European and North American phenomena, and the same is true for the theoretical discourses with which I, and my authors, engage. Consequently I will be drawing on texts from a variety of European countries, and also from North America. The first chapter will consider marriage and domestic architecture in texts by Edith Wharton, Mona Caird and Thomas Hardy; the second will explore the twentieth-century protagonist, alone in a room, in texts by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Henri Barbusse, Virginia Woolf and Franz Kafka; and the third will consider two politically antithetical texts by Ayn Rand and Ann Petry, in which a protagonist struggles to find the point of equilibrium between self and world. The fourth chapter will return, in texts by Elizabeth Bowen, Albert Camus and Alain Robbe-Grillet, to the retreat of the protagonist, and will consider whether these texts are endorsing his sedentary stance. This chapter will also begin to investigate whether post-war authors are using architecture as a figure through which to interrogate the inside/outside dichotomy – a proposition pursued in Chapter 5, which will focus on novels by J.G. Ballard and Doris Lessing. The final chapter will consider walls and skin as related tropes in novels by Chuck Palahniuk and Mark Z. Danielewski, and will investigate whether both are now connective membranes, rather than instruments of separation. It will also pick up a thread which will run through the thesis: the relationship between architecture and writing in twentieth-century fiction. My principal objective is to explore the relationship between literary architecture and the development of what might be deemed a twentieth-century

sensibility, and it is this that has determined the chronological arrangement of the texts. I will seek to identify architectural tropes that they share, but will also explore whether these tropes change, as the century progresses.

Architecture as process will be considered, as well as architecture as product. The thesis will examine the architect as protagonist, and also the decorator (professional and amateur), the stonemason, the builder and the caretaker. In 2007 Michael Berliner – senior adviser to the Ayn Rand Archives and editor of her letters – published an essay intended to "settle the issue of Wright's relationship to Roark", the architect-hero of *The Fountainhead* (1943) (Berliner 2007: 41). In it he forages through biographies, interviews and correspondence for clues that Frank Lloyd Wright was the model for Howard Roark. Having established that their "life stories" and "personalities" have "virtually nothing in common", he eventually concludes that while Wright might not quite have been the "model" for Rand's architect, he was certainly the "inspiration" (51-2, 58). The evidence he provides for his verdict is that Rand "pleaded with [Wright] for an interview, bought clothes she could ill afford when first meeting him, sent him the manuscript of her novel, was hurt when he brushed her off, [and] was overjoyed when he wrote to her about the book" (60). Like Berliner's essay, this thesis will pay some attention to the connection between the fictional architect and the real. Rather than relying on biographical conjecture, however, it will look to Wright's writing on architecture in order to evaluate any similarities between his views and the position of the novel. Rand's primary concern, I will argue, is the relationship between man and world, and to what extent he should compromise and cooperate to live in it. It is a philosophical, and political, concern; and the hypothesis I will be testing is that Rand is not the only twentieth-century writer to use architecture to explore it.

In her *Lectures in America* (published in 1935 following her acclaimed "homecoming" lecture tour), Gertrude Stein situates American avant-garde writing in general, and her own work in particular, in the context of European literary history. When she characterises the nineteenth century as a period "when the inside had become so solidly inside that all the outside could be outside and still the inside was all inside", she is outlining the assumptions of the literary realist, for whom there was no confusion between subject and world – no leakage, or border area (Stein 1935: 28). What happened in the twentieth century, she says, was that writers "suddenly began to feel the outside inside and the inside outside and it was perhaps not so exciting but it was very interesting. Anyway it was quite exciting" (205). With interior and exterior reality

less rigidly demarcated, writers were granted the creative freedom to experiment with the way both were represented. Paradoxically, as this thesis will demonstrate, one of the ways they did so was to shut up their protagonists in rooms. By detaching a human specimen from the world, and surrounding him with walls, the modernist author was able to experiment on him, observe him, and explore what it is to exist uninterrupted (and perhaps uncorrupted) by events beyond the closed door. In these texts the external universe is reduced to a room, while simultaneously human consciousness is allowed to spread beyond the limits of the skull, and to play in the space the room affords. Internal walls, meanwhile, become objects of intense interest – epistemological and ontological – to protagonists who scrutinise them as surfaces to be deciphered, and structures to be challenged.

In her *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (2005) Victoria Rosner claims domestic space as "a generative site for literary modernism": a site as significant as modern urban space, which tends to be so much more discernibly turbulent (Rosner 2005: 2). Rosner's close readings of the life writing of Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, and also of the fiction of Woolf, E.M. Forster and other British modernists, re-evaluate domesticity in avant-garde writing, and claim the inside as a space of radicalism. What interests Rosner, in particular, is the use to which rooms are put. James Joyce's representation of Leopold Bloom using the toilet, for example, demonstrates how much more permissive the modernist room is than its Victorian counterpart (Joyce 1922: 66); and when Woolf tells an anecdote about Strachey's utterance of the word "semen" in a Bloomsbury drawing room (Woolf 1922: 56), it is an "epochal" moment in which "the restrictions on drawing-room conduct collapse and semen (figuratively) floods the room" (Rosner 2005: 89). The work with which my second chapter will engage more closely, however, is Michael Levenson's "From the Closed Room to an Opening Sky" (2007), an essay on Woolf, T.S. Eliot and Wyndham Lewis. Levenson, like Rosner, claims that "modernism begins in a room" (Levenson 2007: 2). He, however, is not envisaging a drawing room – a room which is, after all, as Edith Wharton recognised, really rather a *public* private space. What Levenson argues is that the modernist response to the late nineteenth-century fetishisation of the decorated house is, often, to retreat still further inside: "beyond the cluttered drawing room, into the curtained alcove, the shuttered cabinet, the interior's own interior" (4). "Typically single and self-contained", the modernist room is "not a house for a family", says Levenson, but is, rather, "a box for a brain" (5). Unlike the drawing rooms in

Wharton's "The Reckoning" (1902), one of the short stories analysed in my first chapter, the modernist room pays no attention to what should, or should not, be uttered within its walls. It is not a social room, but a metaphysical one, and it is this that the thesis will consider.

Having accepted Levenson's proposition that "a self, a soul, a pronoun within the receptacle of the room" is a favourite modernist trope, I will demonstrate that it is sometimes extended to include *another* self, within the receptacle of the *next* room (4). In his novel *Hell* (1908) Henri Barbusse houses his protagonist in a hotel room, and provides a hole in the wall between it and the room next door. The room's external wall then becomes a figure for the subject/universe dichotomy, and the internal wall a figure for the divide ("the greatest breach in nature", as William James characterised it in 1890) between self and other (James 1890: 235). If a hole makes it possible to see through a wall into another room, it may also make it possible, Barbusse's narrator surmises, to see through other surfaces and structures – faces, clothes, politics, philosophy, religion – into the core of another being. The thesis will consider the twentieth-century protagonist in relation to the architectural aperture (the window and the door, as well as the hole), and observe how he responds to the promise it seems to offer of contact between self and other, and self and world. In several of the texts analysed it is not just one "self", "soul" or "pronoun" that the author detaches from the world, but a twin self: a married couple. In the first chapter marriage, as social structure, is figured in the house that contains it, and the house appears to feel under no obligation to maintain its neutrality. In the light of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's non-fiction writing on material feminism, and also of polemical writing on "New Marriage" by the Scottish novelist and essayist Mona Caird, the chapter will assess the reaction of domestic architecture (and the furniture it contains) to *fin-de-siècle* challenges to marital orthodoxy, and will also consider the house as field of marital battle. In later chapters, when the house again becomes a combat zone, the thesis will evaluate whether its allegiances change, and to what extent it reflects, generates or promotes marital conflict and reconciliation.

In Caird's "The Yellow Drawing Room" (1892), one of the texts analysed in the first chapter, the "battle of the sexes" is expressed in a battle for decorative control of a house – another trope that will re-emerge later in the thesis. Yellow paint, in Caird's story, performs the same function as "semen", uttered, performs in Woolf's anecdote: it is a subversive substance, which violates the drawing room's modest surfaces.

Painting a wall yellow is a territorial act, I will argue – a bold bid for a room of one's own, which is to be repeated by the narrator's wife in Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (1957) – or so she threatens. But while both texts depict female decoration as an aggressive act, at the *fin-de-siècle* it also speaks of lack of breeding, or even insanity, and compromises a woman's value on the marriage market. The chapter will demonstrate this with extracts from contemporary advice writing on interior decoration, including transcripts of lectures delivered by William Morris in the late nineteenth century, and Edith Wharton's own *The Decoration of Houses* (1897). Experts on decoration did not just advise against bright colour, of course: they advised against pattern. It was in response to decorative excess – "the medley of […] damasks and patterned wallpapers" left behind by the nineteenth century – that Le Corbusier promoted the white wall as the modernist aesthetic paradigm (Le Corbusier 1925: 190). His manifesto for twentieth-century decoration includes a "Law of Ripolin" to enforce whitewashing. The advantage of a white wall, he claims, is that it achieves an "elimination of the equivocal", and provokes a "concentration of intention on its proper object" (192). Pattern is unhealthy, as Adolf Loos reaffirmed in "Ornament and Crime" (1929): it clogs the modernist mind (Loos 1929: 167-76). In my second chapter I will agree with the feminist literary scholar Judith Fetterley, who argues that Gilman's wallpaper pattern is the "text" of her narrator's husband, brother and physician – the convoluted medical discourse employed to justify her incarceration – and that her feverish, fruitless reading of this text is the cause of her insanity. I will take issue with Catherine Golden, though, who suggests that the pattern is a palimpsest, and argue instead that it is an autostereogram – an optical illusion which is an early example of an attempt to deconstruct the surface/structure dichotomy. Later chapters will identify other wall-readers, ranging from the relaxed to the hysterical, and compare them with the narrator of Gilman's tale.

Chapter 4 will identify certain post-war texts in which protagonists again show an inclination to embrace the room as a "box for a brain", and will address the question of whether these texts necessarily endorse their position. Albert Camus's short story "Jonas", for example, specifically pits the "box for a brain" against the "house for a family", and seems, ultimately, to champion the latter. In an early critique of the fable, Adèle King suggested that Camus might have read George Orwell's essay "Inside the Whale" (1940), which was itself a critique of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934). The thesis will examine "Jonas" in the light of King's essay, and Orwell's, and also in

the light of Cyril Connolly's *Enemies of Promise* (1938), a critical and autobiographical work which focuses on the conflicting demands of family life, public life, and artistic productivity, and Hannah Arendt's "The Public and Private Realm" (1958), a chapter from *The Human Condition* in which Arendt argues that one cannot be said to confront reality, or even to be free, if one wilfully confines oneself to the private realm. In his non-fiction Camus displays a strong sense of the artist's responsibility to partake in the world he presumes to represent, and he is not the only writer to maintain that the twentieth century saw a deepening of this responsibility. In *The Art of the Novel* (1986), a series of interviews and essays in which he discusses the modern novel, the Czech-French writer Milan Kundera argues that the twentieth century saw a radical change in what the novelist was called upon to express. Whereas "the wideness of the world used to provide a constant possibility of escape", he writes – a possibility that allowed Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote, for example, to embark on his journeys through "an apparently unlimited world" (Kundera 1986: 27, 8), suddenly, in the twentieth century, the world seemed to close around us. And the shrinkage, he suggests, was caused by catastrophic historical events:

> The decisive event in that transformation of the world into a trap was surely the 1914 war, called (and for the first time in history) a world war". Wrongly 'world'. It involved only Europe, and not *all* of Europe at that. But the adjective 'world' expresses all the more eloquently the sense of horror before the fact that, henceforward, nothing that occurs on the planet will be a merely local matter, that all catastrophes concern the entire world, and that consequently we are more and more determined by external conditions, by situations that no one can escape and that more and more make us resemble one another (27).

Among the issues this thesis will consider is to what extent the bungalows, high-rises, islands, sick rooms, blacked-out rooms and "rooms of one's own", to which the twentieth-century protagonist seems so ready to retreat, are arenas in which authors can explore the legitimacy of quietism as a philosophical and political stance.

"I love claustrophobic spaces. At least you know your limits", observed Louise Bourgeois, the French-American artist and sculptor, in an interview in 1993 (Morris and Bernadac 2007: 81). The remark, given form in the engravings and sculptures with which some of my chapters are illustrated, encapsulates the inclinations of a certain twentieth-century type. The excitement Stein describes, when the century "suddenly began to feel the outside inside and the inside outside", is an excitement the casualties that litter its fiction seem disinclined to share. On the contrary, they seem alarmed by the thinning boundaries between public and private, actualised by such technological

innovations as x-ray and the telephone, as well as two "world" wars. These twentieth-century agoraphobes seem to envy the security of their nineteenth-century forebears, for whom, as Stein puts it, "all the outside could be outside and still the inside was all inside". In *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), his seminal study of modernity and its relationship with modernism, Marshall Berman characterises the experience of modernity as either an embracing of, or a struggle to cope with, being "part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air" (Berman 1982: 345). The tributaries that feed what Berman calls the "modern maelstrom" are scientific discovery and industrialisation; corporate power and class struggle; demographic upheaval and urban growth; mass communication and a distended, unstable capitalist world market (16). To be "modernist", he contends, is "to make [the maelstrom's] rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows" (345-6). It is to do as Stein does: to make oneself at home. This thesis will investigate why the twentieth-century protagonist seems so reluctant to follow the authorial lead: why the narrator of Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall", for example, stays so firmly rooted to her chair, and Samuel Beckett's Murphy uses seven scarves to tie himself to his (Beckett 1938: 5) … and why Christopher Isherwood's single man clings so stubbornly to his illusion that people are rock pools ("each pool is separate and different, and you can, if you are fanciful, give them names, such as George, Charlotte, Kenny, Mrs. Strunk"), rejecting the unity suggested by the approaching flood tide, in which all will inevitably be subsumed (Isherwood 1964: 149).

The thesis will also consider those characters whose response to modernity is to resist enclosure with as much fanaticism as those that insist upon it: who are as attracted by formlessness, fluidity, instability and spatial mingling as their counterparts are repelled. To be modern, after all, as Berman points out in the preface to *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, is to experience *both* the "thrill" and the "dread" of a world in which 'all that is solid melts into air'" (Berman 1982: 12). In 1914 D.H. Lawrence argued that Thomas Hardy's Sue Bridehead suffers from a disorder peculiar to the twentieth century. She is the over-evolved product of centuries of striving for soul at the expense of body, he claimed, and knowledge at the expense of being, and has now "gone too far" in her quest for immersion in unbounded space:

> She had climbed and climbed to be near the stars. And now, at last, on the topmost pinnacle, exposed to all the horrors and the magnificence of space, she

> could not go back. Her strength had fallen from her. Up at that great height, with scarcely any foothold, but only space, space all round her, rising up to her from beneath, she was like a thing suspended, supported almost at the point of extinction by the density of the medium. She existed there as a point of consciousness, no more, like one swooned at a great height, held up at the tip of a fine pinnacle that drove upwards into nothingness (Lawrence 1914: 115-16).

The thesis will consider whether Sue is as desperate to escape the gravity and weightiness of architecture as Lawrence said she is from the body, and will scrutinise other texts for similarly claustrophobic characters. It will explore the relationship, too, between protagonist and furniture, and distinguish between those who nostalgically cling to it, and those who desperately strive to slough off the accumulated encumbrances of previous centuries, so that they may dwell more freely in the new one. And, finally, it will identify those characters who career vertiginously between competing spatial phobias, their anguish manifested in an extravagantly contradictory response to architecture. In Hubert Selby Jr's *The Room* (1971), for example, the initial opinion of the occupant of the eponymous room (a remand cell) seems fairly unequivocal:

> He looked the wall right in the eye and defied it to make a move. Just one single move. Or say a word, and he/d tear it apart. He/d pulverise the cement into powder. If only there was a face to scream into. A face that would say something and he could take the words and shove them down the faces [*sic*] throat. Or beat his fucking breast, or kick the fucking door (Selby 1971: 42).

It is all talk, however. The room is not susceptible to human spleen, and he is more attached to it than he cares to admit. Before long he begins to fret that the warden has forgotten to lock the door, and by the end of the novel it has become his friend:

> The door clanged shut. He heard it clearly, distinctly, over the sound of his breath flowing into the pillow […]. He was safe. His head moved slightly and he looked at the door. Thick, heavy steel. It was smooth and gray. It looked warm. It was impenetrable. It had a small window of thick, unbreakable glass. Wire-mesh glass. Outside were people and lights and baskets and signs, and rooms, and cells, and hallways, and walls and ceiling and floor, but the door was impenetrable. He was safe (261).

The twentieth-century room is alternately a tomb and a cocoon, and its efficacy as the latter is not necessarily to be relied upon. Its doors, like Selby's, are as likely to fail to protect man from the world as they are to fail to connect him with it; and its windows alternately dazzle, pry, expose and disregard. As for its walls, they serve as both

straitjackets and blankets, and twentieth-century protagonists worry incessantly about whether they should be escaping them, graciously accepting their protection, or perhaps concluding, with the heroine of Chuck Palahniuk's *Diary* (2003), that "the truth is, wherever you choose to be, it's the wrong place" (Palahniuk 2003: 168). Whether it is despised, clung to, or scrutinised for meaning, this thesis will demonstrate that architecture in twentieth-century fiction is rarely (though not never) a neutral figure.

To be "modern", then, according to Berman, is to have profoundly polarised sensibilities: "It is to be both revolutionary and conservative: alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic events to which so many modern adventures lead, longing to create and to hold on to something real even as everything melts" (Berman 1982: 13-14). Intrigued by the image of the abyss, as it appears in a range of discourses, Berman traces it back to Rousseau and Nietzsche, among others, and also to Marx, from whose *The Communist Manifesto* his title is taken (17-23). The difference between "modern" and "modernist", he argues, is a fundamental difference in temperament, which determines man's chances of survival in an epoch in which physical and metaphysical structures are relentlessly besieged. The "modernist" is one who successfully negotiates the abyss: who keeps his footing, and thrives. Berman does not mention Sigfried Giedion, the influential twentieth-century historian and architectural critic, but Chapter 3 will point out that he too represents the twentieth century as an epoch struggling to cope with structural disintegration. In the forward to the first edition of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), a collection of essays based on a series of lectures delivered at Harvard University between 1938 and 1939, Giedion depicts the experience of the twentieth century as an unremitting struggle with a series of unnatural disconnections that emerged in the century that preceded it: between thought and feeling, art and science and, particularly, between "inner being" and the external world (Giedion 1941: 13, 17, 165). In *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948), which was published in the wake of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he reiterates his anxiety for a damaged epoch, and goes on to prescribe a remedy:

> Our period demands a type of man who can restore the lost equilibrium between inner and outer reality. This equilibrium, never static but, like reality itself, involved in continuous change, is like that of a tightrope dancer who, by small adjustments, keeps a continuous balance between his being and empty space. We need a type of man who can control his own existence by the process of balancing forces often regarded as irreconcilable: man in equipoise (Giedion 1948: 720).

The chapter will engage with Steven Connor's suggestion, made in an essay written to accompany Catherine Yass's film installation *High Wire* in 2008, that successful tightrope walkers are "not heroes but clowns, who offer better company, seem better, as the Americans say, to hang with" (Connor 2008). It will investigate whether the protagonist who may be designated the "survivor" of twentieth-century fiction is the tightrope walker Giedion demands; and, if so, whether he (or often she) displays the temperament of Connor's successful funambulist. And, as Giedion's elusive point of equilibrium is specifically that between twentieth-century man's "inside" and the "outside" he inhabits, it will also evaluate the surviving protagonist's relationship with architecture, and explore how he manages to maintain his composure among fictional contemporaries who seem so much more likely to respond to collapsing boundaries by walling themselves up, or hurling themselves into free fall, or both in succession.

One of Giedion's principal areas of concern, which he expresses in both *Space, Time and Architecture* and *Mechanization Takes Command*, is the schism between "thought" and "feeling" (Giedion 1941: 16-17; 1948: 14). Science and art, he argues, have lost touch with one another. Shored up by technology, science believes it has outstripped art; and art, for its part, supposes it has no role to play in science. What Giedion sees in modern architecture is the possibility of a merger of two disciplines: a collaboration between art and technology. As well as investigating the ways architecture is used to figure modernity in twentieth-century fiction, this thesis will explore the relationship between architecture and a particular branch of art – writing – and will consider whether the relationship between architecture and text, as it is represented in fiction, reflects the "actual" relationship between the two disciplines. It will ask whether collaboration is possible, or whether their objectives are too fundamentally opposed; and, if it identifies any antagonism between architecture and writing, it will consider how it is played out in fiction, and whether it intensifies as the century progresses. It will also explore the discursive interchange between fiction and architectural theory – comparing the skyscraper as it appears in *The Fountainhead*, for example, with the skyscrapers of two influential blueprints for urban planning: Le Corbusier's *The Radiant City* (1933) and Frank Lloyd Wright's *The Living City* (1958); and the high-rise as it appears in J.G. Ballard's *High-Rise* (1975) and Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) with two equally influential critiques of urban planning: Jane Jacobs's *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and Oscar Newman's "Defensible Space" (1972).

Architecture is a profession that prides itself on the strength, presence, permanence and rationality of its product, and is generally admired for these attributes. "Architecture is discipline!" exclaims Giedion in *Space, Time and Architecture*, in response to Mies van der Rohe's Lake Shore Apartments in Chicago, marvelling at the "uncompromising strength" with which "the architect permits not the slightest deviation from the clear-cut plane surfaces of the glass parallelepipeds" (Giedion 1941: 607). It is this unclouded resolve that writing, as represented in architectural discourse, tends to lack. Not only is it considered architecture's inferior, it is often a source of irritation. In his "Kindergarten Chats", written as though from a master builder to his pupil in the periodical *Interstate Architect and Builder* in 1901, Louis Sullivan expresses his impatience with verbiage:

> Some time ago you asked what connection there might be between words and architecture. There is this immediate and important connection – that architecture, for the past six centuries, has suffered from a growing accretion of words: It is now in fact overgrown and choked with meaningless words, silly words, vapid words – and meanwhile the reality has been lost in view and words and phrases have usurped the place of deeds, and, finally phrase-making is accepted for architecture making […] If you doubt it, go to conventions, read the journals, listen to the papers and speeches. What are they? – words, words, words – mostly feeble words, mostly inconsequential, half-hearted, wholly sordid (Sullivan 1901: 74-5).

Writing – this loathsome weed whose fecundity renders it all the more visible, and all the more insidiously convincing for the undiscerning audience – is a threat to architecture, whose strength lies in its rationality, reliability and durability. Almost a century later, in an essay adapted from a paper he delivered to one of the *Spaced Out* conferences at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, and which he testily entitles "*Rappel à l'Ordre*: The Case for the Tectonic" (1996), Kenneth Frampton accounts for what he also sees as architecture's superiority over text: "One may assert that building is *ontological* rather than representational in character and that built form is a presence rather than something standing for an absence. In Martin Heidegger's terminology we may think of it as a 'thing' rather than a 'sign' (Frampton 1996: 179). And in *Behind the Postmodern Facade* (1993), a critique of the architectural profession in late twentieth-century America, Magali Sarfatti Larson reminds us that architectural products are "not words, not paper, not merely texts but buildings [which] must (even by law) be sound" (Larson 1993: 252). Reacting against an "overintellectual" postmodernist culture that is "governed by the abstraction of the linguistic metaphor",

Larson joins Frampton in insisting that architecture is not a text to be read: "The materiality of architecture is inescapable. This is the art that does not represent and does not signify but *is*". It is perhaps no surprise that in comparison writing, necessarily representative, seems weak, irrational, and dispensable.

This "*is*"ness, however – this pedestrian materiality that architecture cannot help but display – is occasionally a source of frustration, even for the discipline's own practitioners. Lebbeus Woods, one of the founders of the Research Institute for Experimental Architecture in New York, tells of the pressures on the architect to conform in "a field largely devoted to valorizing the normal" (Woods 1996: 200); and Bernard Tschumi, an architect and theorist associated with the deconstructivist movement, feels similarly restricted. He describes a conversation he had with the philosopher Jacques Derrida at a meeting he had requested "in order to try to convince him to confront his own work with architecture" (Tschumi 1996: 250). Derrida, he reports, was bemused: "'But how could an architect be interested in deconstruction? After all, deconstruction is anti-form, anti-hierarchy, anti-structure, the opposite of all that architecture stands for'". "'Precisely for that reason'", Tschumi replied. It is architecture's apparent immunity to deconstruction – its readiness to stand lumpishly where it is, a constant reminder of the inside/outside dichotomy it has irrefutably created – that deconstructivist architects wished to challenge. Where their predecessors meekly reflected structure, they set out to question and revise it. And if architecture is deemed an anachronistic encumbrance, rather than a symbol of virile modernity, writing, so much lighter on its feet, has much to recommend it, as many architects have themselves concluded. Straitjacketed by public opinion, and sometimes by political directive, it is not easy for the architect to position himself in the vanguard. There are, however, no such constraints on his *writing*; and architects, as the literary critic and architectural theorist Lewis Mumford pointed out in the introduction to a collection of architectural essays written between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, "spelt the new ideas out in words long before they learned the art of translating them into sticks and stones and steel" (Mumford 1959: 4). Architecture's materiality (and indeed its expense) constrains it to conform, but writing is under no such obligation. It has expressive advantages that its rival lacks. Architects often write well, for all Sullivan's disapproval, and a number of the writers included in this study have contributed to both literary and architectural discourse.

The thesis will also consider whether the theory that architecture is "thing", rather than "sign", adequately explains, for the writer, the effect it has on the human mind. Architecture could, after all, so easily not be there. As Jennifer Bloomer points out in an essay based on an address she delivered to an architects' symposium in 1989: "In the Garden of Eden there was no architecture (Bloomer 1989: 371). It was only once sin and shame were introduced, she goes on to say, that we felt the need to shut them in. The fig leaf was the first wall, and the human race has since become habituated to boundary. For the urban explorer, Jeff "Ninjalicious" Chapman, overcoming this habit is the first principle of trespass. In *Access All Areas* (2005), his manual for architectural subversion, he describes a ploy used by fish farmers to keep their stock penned up:

> They corral their fish into a certain section of the ocean and then surround the area with a curtain of air bubbles being released in a steady steam from a perforated tube or hose at the bottom of the corral. The fish perceive the air bubbles as a solid wall and believe they are helplessly penned in, though in reality no barrier stands in their way except a thin strand of colourless gas. The only thing stopping the fish from swimming to freedom and exploring all the infinite wonders of the ocean is a simple problem of limited perception (Ninjalicious 2005: 75).

What distinguishes human beings from fish is that we are not hoodwinked by the illusion. Like Selby's prisoner, however, we nonetheless collude with it; and it is this readiness to collude that Ninjalicious's trespasser must overcome. When an enthusiastic young economist in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian novel *Moving the Mountain* (1911) exclaims: "'Ideas are the real things, Sir! Bricks and mortar? Bah! We can put bricks and mortar in any shape we choose – but we have to choose first'", he is making a similar point (Gilman 1911: 131). It is in the conceptual boundary, preceding the material barrier, that power inheres. Once man has chosen his rules of exclusion, his spheres and territories, the walls he builds demonstrate them as effectively as they embody them. Architecture, actually, is both ontological *and* representative.

In *The Edifice Complex* (2005), a study of the relationship between architecture and power in the twentieth century, Deyan Sudjic describes architecture as "a device" that offers "the chance to forget the precariousness of our position for a moment" – that gives us "the illusion of meaning", and "the possibility of a fleeting respite from the random" (Sudjic 2005: 286). The thesis will suggest that one of the reasons for architecture's conspicuousness, in twentieth-century fiction, is that authors are drawing

attention to its propensity to deceive. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), for example, ends with the omniscient narrator's description of the abrupt recovery of one of the novel's earlier narrators – the autistic Benjamin Compson – following a violent panic attack caused by being driven anti-clockwise around the town square. Benjy's sudden placidity, when the driver turns his horse, is reflected in the regularity of the passing architectural landscape: "His eyes were empty and blue and serene again as cornice and façade flowed smoothly once more from left to right; post and tree, window and doorway, and signboard, each in its ordered place" (Faulkner 1929: 284). But the orderliness of these architectural accessories is belied by the "emptiness" in the young man's eyes. It is a "respite from the random" as soothing as Ninjalicious's curtain of bubbles, and also as illusory. It fools the final narrator, as it fools Benjy, but Faulkner has made it clear that it is Benjy's own, disjointed narrative that gives the more authentic representation of reality. Architecture encourages a nostalgia for realism, of which twentieth-century writers are unfailingly suspicious. They question the powerful aura of permanence architecture likes to exude, and point out its actual transience. T.E. Hulme points out in a 1912 "image", for example, that "old houses were scaffolding once/ and workmen whistling" (Hulme 1912: 49); and the narrator of Ian McEwan's *The Cement Garden* (1978) stands on a concrete slab that is all that remains of a neighbouring prefab, and marvels "that a whole family could live inside this rectangle of concrete" (McEwan 1978: 124). It seems so far-fetched, to this young man, that walls should make such a difference to space. One would expect Ayn Rand to remain unreservedly impressed by architecture. It was, one would assume, its solid objectivist credentials that prompted her to choose it as the backdrop for *The Fountainhead*; and it is true that Roark's authority, independence, rationality and integrity distinguish him sharply from the practitioners of her own discipline (novelists, poets, playwrights and journalists), as she depicts them in her novel. My thesis will call into question, however, the apparent imporousness of Rand's buildings and the architect that designed them; and will investigate whether the skyscrapers, predominant as they appear to be, are actually being steadily undermined by the novel.

When Charles Jencks made his famous announcement, in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977), that "modern architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 pm (or thereabouts)", he aligned its demise with that of the Pruitt-Igoe high-rise housing project, and ascribed it partly to the federal public housing authority, and partly to the project's "black inhabitants" (Jencks 1977: 23). The

principal cause of death, though, he claimed, was Pruitt-Igoe's extreme debilitation, after it had been "flogged to death remorselessly for ten years by critics such as Jane Jacobs". The thesis will examine how Jencks came to the conclusion that the disgraced structure was undermined *textually*, long before its ultimate, very public execution, by *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. A far cry from the silly, feeble nuisance to a superior discipline that Sullivan styled it in "Kindergarten Chats", writing, it seems, is now a powerful force, capable of bringing the mighty tower block to its knees. The thesis will consider whether, in the second half of the twentieth century, fictional architecture becomes as vulnerable as its literal counterpart; and what, if so, are the material, political and philosophical consequences for the protagonists that inhabit it. Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1949), which is analysed in my fourth chapter, is set in London during the blitz and its aftermath – a setting which allows its author to test the strength of boundaries that had hitherto seemed unassailable. The inside/outside dichotomy is very obviously compromised, when walls have been so literally fractured, but so too are other, less material polarities – between past and present, present and absent, living and dead, self and other, and even (paradoxically, in the context of war) between friend and enemy. The chapter will consider how Bowen's protagonists cope with the literal decline of architectural potency, and how the decline affects their chances of survival, as well as their susceptibility to treachery.

Walls that began to dwindle and fragment in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* continue to do so as the century progresses; and, as they thin, they also become more flexible. In J.G. Ballard's "The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista" (1962), for example, a house buyer apparently falls in love with a property that has taken on the characteristics of its unhinged former owner; and in his "The Enormous Space" (1989) a man shuts himself in a house that then expands, obligingly, to accommodate him. The thesis will examine the elasticity of architecture in fiction in the second half of the twentieth century, and its seeming sensitivity to human emotion, and will compare it with the authoritarian inclinations of architecture at the beginning of the century. It will also explore fiction's increasing interest in binarism, and investigate any challenges to binarism it poses. In the penultimate chapter of *The Poetics of Space* (1957), his study of the overlap between the architectural and the literary imagination, the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard distances his phenomenological approach from the "geometrical cancerization of the linguistic tissue of contemporary philosophy" which is how he styles the approach of his structuralist contemporaries (Bachelard 1957: 213).

"Outside and inside form a dialectic of division", he argues, "the obvious geometry of which blinds us as soon as we bring it into play in metaphorical domains"; and the dualisation of reality is always "tinged with aggressivity" (211-12). My thesis will consider how Bowen and other, later authors, interrogate the "aggressive" division between inside and outside, and how they look to the wall itself as a possible site of mingling – a place where presence may harbour absence; where present may welcome past and future, and where solitude is not incompatible with solidarity.

In *The Culture of Time and Space* (1983), a survey of the cultural effects of technological change between 1880 and World War I, Stephen Kern lists some of the apparently inviolable structures with which the traditional world had been held together:

> Everything had a separate nature, a correct place, and a proper function, as the entire world was ordered in discrete and mutually exclusive forms: solid/porous, opaque/transparent, inside/outside, public/private, city/country, noble/common, countryman/foreigner, framed/open, actor/audience, ego/object, and space/time. These old scaffoldings had supported the way of life and culture of the Western world for so long that no one could recall exactly how they all started or why they were still there (Kern 1983: 209-10).

Innovations such as mass-produced glass, radio, the telephone exchange, and systems for the transmission of electricity and gas, meant that inside and outside could no longer be seen to be "securely and unambiguously divided by solid walls"; and skin was compromised, too, as x-ray illuminated the human skeleton and threatened to betray "the secrets of the heart" (209). Kern agrees with Gertrude Stein that it was the increasing impotence of physical boundaries that excited artists of the period his study covers. It offered figurative opportunities, he argues, for expressing what they saw as a corresponding loosening of metaphysical boundaries between self, other and world. This thesis will argue that for twentieth-century writers the wall – the tangible form in which dualism is expressed – became a figure for the "/" that divides Kern's opposing terms; and that another world war, an escalating nuclear threat, globalisation, and the development of the worldwide web, rendered it both less and less robust as the century progressed, and more and more intriguing. A reluctance to exclude the middle is a notable feature of postmodernist architectural theory. The "gentle manifesto" which opens Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966), for example, sets out the postmodern preference for the "both-and" over the "either-or"; and the "black and white, and sometimes gray", over the "black or white" (Venturi

1966: 16). This thesis will explore whether, as literary modernism gives way to literary postmodernism, fictional architecture, like its literal counterpart, will be asked to relinquish binarism, and whether it will relinquish it with more success. It will evaluate the significance of the wall in late twentieth-century fiction, and also re-evaluate its significance in some early twentieth-century texts; and ask whether perhaps the role it is performing is not (or not always) one of unyielding boundary between "inside" and "outside". It will compare the wall in fiction with the "hymen" as offered by Derrida in his analysis of Stéphan Mallarmé's prose-poem "Mimique" in "The Double Session" (1970), and ask whether it too becomes an "undecidable", "in-between" membrane of mediation, rather than a hostile marker of division (Derrida 1970: 222-23). In his *The Book of Skin* (2004) Steven Connor identifies three stages in the cultural history of skin, and argues that the skin, in late twentieth-century culture, became an intriguing site: "a place of minglings, a mingling of places" (Connor 2004: 26) – what the French philosopher Michel Serres calls a "*milieu*" (Serres 2008: 80). My final chapter will analyse the dual role of walls and skin in Chuck Palahniuk's *Diary* (2003) and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), and investigate whether the wall in these novels, like skin, takes on a new role – in defiance of binary opposition – as connective membrane, communicative surface, and *milieu*.

"The Double Session" published in *Dissemination* in 1970, is based on two untitled seminars given by Derrida in 1969 for the *Groupe d'Etudes Théoriques*. At the beginning of the first session, Derrida distributed a sheet on which were printed a segment of Plato's *Philebus* (one of the Socratic dialogues) and, in a column in the corner of the page, Mallarmé's prose-poem. Derrida's *Glas* (1974) is similarly arranged: Georg Hegel's philosophical writing occupies a column on the left of the page, and Jean Genet's autobiographical writing (in a different font and type size) occupies a column on the right. Derrida's mediating commentary and marginalia, meanwhile, appear in between the two. At the beginning of the "The Double Session", Derrida explains its typography:

> What is the purpose of placing these two texts there, and of placing them in that way, at the opening of a question about what goes (on) or doesn't go (on) between literature and truth? That question will remain, like these two texts and like this mimodrama, a sort of epigraph to some future development, while the thing entitled surveys (from a great height) an event, of which we will still be obliged, at the end of the coming session, to point to the absence (Derrida 1970: 197-8).

House of Leaves, at many points, is similarly arranged: architecture appears in columns (in the form of lists, principally), sometimes on the right of the page, sometimes on the left, and sometimes in the centre; and other texts – film scripts, commentaries, architectural theory – are, like Derrida's marginalia, distributed beside, above, below and between the columns. Architectural and literary discourse (house and leaves), I will argue, are brought together in Danielewski's novel like Derrida's "literature" and "truth"; and Derrida himself appears as a character specifically to deconstruct the opposition between the two. "Derrida" (the character) is interested in what lies between architecture and text, and in how both contain the other; and he is also interested in what lies *beyond* both. "'Hold my hand'", he says to one of the protagonists, leading her away from house, text, cinematic screen and photographic frame: "'We stroll'". The thesis will conclude by considering the relationship between architecture in late twentieth-century fiction and deconstruction, and will explore whether Danielewksi and Palahniuk, in their millennial texts, are positing a more participative world, uncontained by walls or book jackets.

1.

Stained Floors and Superseded Rooms: Marriage and Domestic Architecture in Three *Fin-de-Siècle* Fictions

To be modern, claims Marshall Berman in *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982), is to have profoundly polarised sensibilities:

> It is to be both revolutionary and conservative: alive to new possibilities for experience and adventure, frightened by the nihilistic events to which so many modern adventures lead, longing to create and to hold on to something real even as everything melts (Berman 1982: 13-14).

The image of the abyss, as it appears in a range of discourses, is what intrigues Berman. He traces it back to Rousseau and Nietzsche, among others, and also to Marx, from whose *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) his title is taken (17-23). What "the first great wave of thinkers of modernity" share, he argues, whether their perspective is material (in the case of Marx, Hegel and Carlyle, for example), or artistic (in the case of Stendhal, Flaubert and Dickens), is "the thrill and dread of a world in which 'all that is solid melts into air'" (132, 13). At the turn of the twentieth century, I contend, this sense of structural dissolution was particularly strong, and so was the accompanying abyssal thrill – or dread. In 1895 Max Nordau warned of a world in which "forms lose their outlines, and are dissolved in floating mist", its increasingly ineffectual boundaries an ominous sign of its degeneration (Nordau 1895: 5-6); and in *The Time Machine*, published the same year, H.G. Wells specifically identifies architectural decline as a symptom of degeneration. By AD 802,701 the private dwelling has disappeared, and the moribund Eloi have lost the ability to build (Wells 1895: 29). Wells has mixed feelings about domestic architecture, however, as he demonstrates in "Zoological Retrogression", an article that appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1891. Here it is the house that is retrogressive. Wells mourns the progress of his "respectable citizen of the professional classes" from a youth "of activity and imagination, of 'liveliness and eccentricity', of '*Sturm und Drang*'" to a middle age of "calm domesticity", in which "he secretes a house, or 'establishment' round himself, of inorganic and servile material", and begins to live "an almost entirely vegetative excrescence on the side of the street" (Wells 1891: 162-3). For Charlotte Perkins Gilman, too, the house emasculates its occupants. A "strangling cradle", she designates it in *Women and*

Economics (1898), which retards women's development, and would retard men's too – if they would allow it (Gilman 1898: 267). In *The Home* (1903) she again deplores the enfeebling effect, on both sexes, of architectural enclosure: "Whosoever, man or woman; lives always in a small dark place, is always guarded, protected, directed and restrained, will become inevitably narrowed and weakened by it" (Gilman 1903: 277). If women are more commonly thus diminished than men, it is only because they are more often confined inside.

The new century, as far as Gilman is concerned, should be seen as an opportunity for social progress through architectural innovation. In her magazine *The Forerunner* (1909-1910) she enthusiastically advocates communal nurseries, kitchens and laundries to draw women through to the public side of the domestic wall. Other writers, though, were alarmed for their welfare. In Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) Lily Bart shrinks from marriage, and is stalked by homelessness as a consequence. At one point she looks at the room her aunt has grudgingly spared her, and is struck by "its ugliness, its impersonality, the fact that nothing in it was really hers" (Wharton 1905: 118). "To a torn heart uncomforted by human nearness a room may open almost human arms", she reflects, "and the being to whom no four walls mean more than any others, is, at such hours, expatriate everywhere". The feminist heroine of Wells's *Ann Veronica* (1909) is reminded by her more cautious older brother that: "'A home *may* be a sort of cage, but still – it's a home'" (Wells 1909: 101); and even Gilman concedes that the house is "the centre and circumference, the start and finish of most of our lives" (Gilman 1898: 204). Domestic architecture may hobble us, but it also structures, and shelters, our being. Unmarried, Lily Bart lives as a houseguest, and dies a lodger in a dingy boarding house. It should not be assumed, though, that Wharton's wives' hold on domestic architecture is any less tenuous. Matrimonial legislation in the second half of the nineteenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic, had made divorce more practicable, and "New Marriage" must have been an attractive proposition for a writer famously trapped in an unhappy one. In her short story "The Reckoning" (1902), however, Wharton expresses two reservations: that the new laws would expose women to vulgarity, and that they would render them homeless.

The chapter will draw on contemporary advice writing on decoration, including Wharton's own; on D.H. Lawrence's "Study of Thomas Hardy" (as much an essay on man's struggle with modernity as it is as a literary study); and, because all the

texts analysed are literary responses to contemporary changes in marital law, on polemical writing by Gilman and Mona Caird on marriage and the home.

Edith Wharton's "The Reckoning" (1902)

The second marriage enjoyed by "The Reckoning"'s heroine, Julia Westall, is a contract in which adultery is not recognised, and from which either party can be released at any time. Her first marriage proved a claustrophobic one, in which her husband's disposition "clos[ed] gradually in on her, obscuring the sky and cutting off the air, till she felt herself shut up among the decaying bodies of her starved hopes" (Wharton 1902: 304). Her husband Clement, on the other hand, shares both her opinion that "no marriage need be an imprisonment", and her satisfaction that "the door of divorce stood open" (305). This marriage is an altogether more relaxed, and better ventilated, structure than her first. The story opens at an "afternoon" hosted by the wealthy van Siderens in their much-envied New York studio, at which Westall has been invited to speak on "the immorality of marriage" (297). The guests have been served whisky and soda, rather than the customary tea, to signal the audacity of the event. As Julia listens to her husband proclaim the Westall views on marriage from his improvised platform – views that were her own, as it happens, before they were his – she is surprised by a feeling of discomfort, which seems to derive from the nature of the room. Occasions such as these are customarily held in "long New York drawing rooms" – enclosed spaces where unconventional ideas can be privately murmured – and she is disagreeably aware that a studio is custom-built for exhibition (296). Observing that Westall's listeners are as delighted by his loud utterance as they are by their host's painted depictions of grass and sky (purple and green, respectively), she begins to suspect that this particular New York "set" is "tired of the conventional colour-scheme in art and conduct" – aroused by clashes, of both colour and moral code (297).

In *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), a manual of interior decoration co-written with the architect Ogden Codman Jr, Wharton insists upon rooms of "repose and distinction", "proportion", and "good breeding" (Wharton and Codman 1897: 33) – all virtues demonstrated, in stark contrast with the room they have just left – by the Westalls' own drawing room. An intimate, inconspicuous space, the room has safely contained the couple's marital experiment, and muted with "shaded lamps" and "quiet-coloured walls" their "evening confidences" (Wharton 1902: 300). Now that Westall

has broadcast the marriage, though – displayed it in a studio – it is its exposure to the "vulgar" that alarms Julia (297). "Vulgarity", after all, as Wharton and Codman primly assert in the "Bric-à-Brac" chapter of *The Decoration of Houses*, "is always noisier than good breeding" (Wharton and Codman 1897: 186). Too late, Julia recognises that "the articles of her faith" are too "esoteric" to be let loose the other side of the drawing-room wall where, she begins to fear, "almost everyone was vulgar" (Wharton 1902: 297). When her husband was satisfied to discuss their ideas inside, alone with her, she felt secure in her intellectual and social superiority. Now that he has "chosen to descend from the heights of privacy and stand hawking his convictions at the street corner", however, she is reluctant to join him in the limelight.

It is in the well-bred drawing room that Julia expresses her qualms to Westall; and the crack in their marriage, immediately apparent in his impatient reply, is manifested in an unprecedented spatial warping. Unbidden, framed within the current room, obtrudes, in Julia's mind, the drawing room of her first marriage. "It must never be forgotten", Wharton and Codman warn in *The Decoration of Houses*: "that every one is unconsciously tyrannised over by the wants of others – the wants of dead and gone predecessors, who have an inconvenient way of thrusting their different habits and tastes across the current of later existences" (Wharton and Codman 1897: 19); and the "wilderness of upholstery" that comes bursting through the Westalls' subdued walls, together with the equally haphazard pictures of Roman peasants and statues of Greek slaves, is just such an intrusion (Wharton 1902: 300). In her *The Ethnography of Manners* (1995) Nancy Bentley argues that rooms, for Wharton, are the equivalent of the anthropologist's "field" – territories that reflect the system of meanings adopted by a particular cultural group. In the "social hierarchy of values in home decoration" presented in *The Decoration of Houses*, she points out, Victorian eclecticism ranks particularly low (Bentley 1995: 82-3). In "The Reckoning", I suggest, it is the heroine, rather than the author, who is the drawing-room anthropologist. Julia thinks of her marital history in markedly evolutionary terms. John Arment was "as instinctive as an animal or a child", "undeveloped" and capable of feeling only "in a blind rudimentary way"; and in abandoning him, she reassures herself, she left behind a "low nature […] alone on its inferior level" (Wharton 1902: 304-5). His drawing room, filled with lurchings, obstructions and juttings-out, and jangling with furniture, is, as far as Julia is concerned, similarly under-evolved. Crawling with history – personal and cultural – it proclaims its allegiance to the established codes of "old" New York. Westall's drawing

room on the other hand, as befits a "rising" lawyer with "advanced" ideas, is refined, unembellished, and assertively modern (305). In switching drawing rooms Julia has made a temporal advance, as well as a social one.

The conflation of "marriage" and "house" (implied by Wells, too, in his disapproval of the domestication of the respectable young citizen), is entrenched in Julia, and has been carried forward from her first to her second marriage. Alienated by its clutter, Julia was unable "to establish any closer relation than that between a traveller and a railway station" with the Arment drawing room, and the marriage it contained had a no less impermanent feel. The mistake she has made in her second marital home, she now recognises, is to assume its elegance is a manifestation of its structural stability. In the ten years of her marriage to Westall, as she asks herself: "How often had either of them stopped to examine its foundation? The foundation is there, of course – the house rests on it – but one lives above-stairs and not in the cellar" (301). As she looks now at her current drawing room – "the room for which she had left that other room" – she begins to doubt its sincerity (300). It seems to display "a superficial refinement which had no relation to the deeper significances of life"; and her husband's face, too, has "a kind of surface-sensitiveness akin to the surface-refinement of its setting". So juxtaposed, there is less to distinguish between the rooms, and the marriages, than Julia had supposed. The more civilised second may actually be as disposable as the more primitive first.

As the rift between the Westalls widens, their house makes very clear where its allegiances lie. When Westall refuses to abandon his public speaking, Julia "feels the floor fail", and has to lean on a chair for support (307). And when he announces his intention of leaving her for the young, cigarette-smoking Una van Sideren, the drawing room "waver[s] and darken[s]", then becomes definitely malevolent (308). "Every detail of her surroundings", formerly so soothing, now turns against Julia, who experiences "the tick of the clock, the slant of the sunlight on the wall, the hardness of the chair arms that she grasped, [as] a separate wound to each sense". Her faith in "The New Ethics" evaporates as she feels "her identity […] slipping away from her" with her marriage and her drawing room (296, 309). As she tries to cling to architecture ("This is my room – this is my house"), she can "almost hear the walls laugh back at her" (309). Signifiers of marriage – "room", "husband", "dining out" – lose their validity, and the "visual continuity" offered by Westall's sticks, umbrellas and gloves in the hall is "intolerable" (310). Proof of the house's cold-blooded insouciance

("within a gaping chasm; without, the same untroubled and familiar surface"), these male accessories are markers of territory. It is Westall who occupies the house, while Julia, "the victim of the code she had devised", is morally and legally unplaced.

Having been buried alive in her first marriage, Julia is evicted from her second into a ruthless public sphere. The street is "bare and hideous", "radiant" and "metallic" – a harshly lit, modern world in which "everything stared and glittered", and her vulnerability derives from her relentless visibility (311). After finding brief respite in a hansom cab, she is again cast out when denied access to the Van Sideren house. Wandering through "strange thoroughfares", she finds herself "in the afternoon torrent of Broadway, swept past tawdry shops and flaming posters, with a succession of meaningless faces gliding by in the opposite direction." She is one of the crowd that, up until now, her unobtrusive drawing room has kept at bay, surrounded by the glaring publicity of mass culture which the "subdued tones" of her walls have seemed always to screen (300). When darkness falls the street becomes "sinister"; Julia, after all, is "not used to being out alone at that hour" (312). To be divorced is to be alarmingly unaccommodated, and denied the protection of the private sphere. In a scene that prefigures *Brief Encounter* (1945) she avoids a policeman she "fancied […] was watching her". Without home or husband, she is beyond the protection of the law. Eventually her wanderings terminate – apparently by chance – outside the house of her first marriage.

Julia's "first husband's house" is particularly keen to emphasise it is not hers (313). Its unwelcoming blinds are drawn, and its front door is firmly shut against her. In *The Decoration of Houses* Wharton and Codman have strong opinions on the convincingness of doors, especially external ones. "It should be borne in mind", they advise, "that, while the main purpose of a door is to admit, its secondary purpose is to exclude. The outer door, which separates the hall or vestibule from the street, should clearly proclaim itself an effectual barrier" (Wharton and Codman 1897: 107). In an article on Wharton, Henry James and The Mount (Wharton's Massachusetts estate, which she designed in 1902) Sarah Luria argues that doors are central to Wharton's "architectural creed": "It is they that do the including and excluding, with the result that they establish an inner elite by determining who is allowed in – and, crucially, how far in" (Luria 1999: 195). Doors reinforce manners by shoring up the boundary between public and private; then by controlling access. In The Mount, as Luria points out: "seven sets of doors lead to the drawing room alone". In "The Reckoning", of course, both

drawing rooms are situated in the city; and it is the particular duty of the front doors to protect them from the vulgar crowd – of which the fugitive divorcée is now a constituent. As Julia stands before the Arment door, her first husband himself walks past her, lets himself in with a latchkey, and shuts the door behind him. Julia is desperate enough, though, to ring the electric bell. Experienced in the ways of doors, she knows immediately that the young footman with the "fresh inexperienced face" is a less effective guardian of the threshold than the parlour maid who barred her entrance to the Van Sideren mansion a short while before, and that she will be allowed to "advance" into the hall (Wharton 1902: 313). The hall is this side of the front door, of course, and therefore qualifies as a private room; and yet, according to Wharton and Codman, it is a room that has something of the street about it. The nucleus of a complex system of access and exclusion that governs houses, it is "the centre upon which every part of the house directly or indirectly opens":

> This publicity is increased by the fact that the hall must be crossed by the servant who opens the front door, and by any one admitted to the house. It follows that the hall, in relation to the rooms of the house, is like a public square in relation to the private houses around it (Wharton and Codman 1897: 118).

Crossing the hall from the direction of the front door, the footman now stations himself before the drawing-room door. In control not just of her access to the house, but also of how far she is to be allowed in, it is his role to intercept Julia's presumptuous advance from public to private space. When Arment himself opens the drawing-room door from within, however, the footman concedes. As Julia demands to speak to him, Arment shrinks back from the "publicity" of the hall. Acutely aware of the footman, he ushers her into the room, and once more closes the door.

"Time has not mitigated", in Julia's opinion, the "horrors" of the drawing room she left behind and, on this return visit, the horrors are compounded by a certain cruelty (Wharton 1902: 314). Although the Westall drawing room discreetly deadens sound, it has always allowed her to speak. The Arment drawing room on the other hand, as she now discovers, actively interferes with utterance. Vocally inhibited, Julia finds that "words and arguments run […] into each other in the heat of her longing" to say what she came to say. Her voice "fail[s] her", she "struggle[s] for a word", and, tongue-tied, she "imagine[s] herself thrust out before she could speak". When, finally, she is able to voice the news of her second husband's desertion, it is in a whisper she fears may yet

be too loud. It seems to "dilate to the limit of the room" (315). Arment, indeed, seems worried it may escape beyond it, and casts an embarrassed glance towards the door to the hallway – that "public square" which is still patrolled by the footman. His drawing room, though, proves politer than Westall's, for all its *déclassé* furnishings. Repressive it may be, but it also defends innerness – architectural, social and sexual – and protects the individual from the vulgar mass. Eventually, by stationing herself between ex-husband and door, in "breathless phrases", her throat "swelled" with anguish, Julia utters her message. She has changed her mind. Her view, now, is that "inner law" should supersede divorce law, because otherwise there is "nothing to prevent us spreading ruin unhindered" (316). Having successfully uttered her recantation, she opens the door, and her second eviction begins. As she moves into the hall Arment steps forward as if to rescue her, but she is now in the realm of the unforgiving footman. "Advanc[ing] from the background", he throws open the front door as Arment retreats (317). It closes behind her, and Julia finds herself "once more outside in the darkness" – banished to the public street.

In a study of Wharton's gothic fiction Kathy Fedorko argues that, for Wharton's female protagonists, "terror of the outside unknown is transmuted into terror of the internal unknown, within the house […] rather than outside of it" (Fedorko 1995: 12). More recently, Darcie Rives has demonstrated that in gothic tales such as "The Lady's Maid (1902), "Kerfol" (1916), "Bewitched" (1925) and "Mr Jones" (1928) walls, doors and heavy curtains oppress Wharton's female characters, and permit domestic violence by screening it from public view (Rives 2006: 11). "The Reckoning", I suggest, is a much more agoraphobic text. By locking its heroine out, rather than in, it expresses Wharton's twin anxieties about the "new" New York high society represented by the Van Sideren set: its lack of respect for privacy ("one of the first requisites of civilised life", as Wharton and Codman insist in *The Decoration of Houses* (Wharton and Codman 1897: 25)), and its toleration of divorce. Wharton, ultimately, has mixed feelings about divorce. She accepts that Julia's first marriage was "too concrete a misery" to be endured, and she is careful to emphasise that the marriage to Westall has lasted ten years (Wharton 1902: 304). Julia is no Undine Spragg, flitting from marriage to marriage in *The Custom of the Country* (1913). On the other hand, though, Wharton worries that divorce is now threatening women's sovereignty over domestic space, and, indeed, their safety. The New York elite's professed permissiveness is belied by houses that are well disposed towards women only as long as it is conventional, monogamous

marriage they are expected to accommodate. Otherwise, their principal allegiance is to men. Westall pays nothing for his effortless walk through the "open door of divorce". The van Sideren set rewards him for his public allegiance to the new marital code by continuing to accommodate him, and so does his house. Arment, too, armed with his latchkey and guarded by the architecture and servants of the old elite, is free to pass in and out. Julia, on the other hand, who has dared now to challenge the views of both communities, has forfeited all control over domestic architecture. The new century has failed to emancipate her, and the old to protect her. Both, indeed, have collaborated to unhouse her; and she is cast out, rather than released, into to a public sphere that is, for the divorced woman, a void.

Mona Caird's "The Yellow Drawing Room" (1892)

"'It must be pure bliss to arrange the furniture just as one likes'", says Lily Bart, wistfully, in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905): "'If I could only do over my aunt's drawing room I know I should be a better woman'" (Wharton 1905: 8). Unlike her creator, she lacks money, property, and husband – combined deficiencies that disqualify her from the decoration of houses. Her yen for interior decoration, indeed, directly compromises her marriage prospects: it is her refusal to guarantee that she "wouldn't do over the drawing room" that provokes the mother of a promising suitor to ship him, hastily, to India (10). When the father of another *fin de siècle* heroine, therefore, gives her "permission to decorate and furnish the drawing room exactly as she please[s]" he is, perhaps, taking an unusual risk (Caird 1892: 21). Mona Caird's "The Yellow Drawing Room" is narrated by a potential husband who is as threatened as Lily Bart's by female decorators. Indeed three weeks under the Haydons' roof, Mr St Vincent complains, have "deprived me of myself, unhinged me, destroyed the balance of my character". The reason he gives for his agitation is that Vanora Haydon has "unworthily employed her liberty by producing a room of brilliant yellow". Vanora does not own the drawing room, of course. Houses are male property in Caird's Scotland, just as they are in Wharton's New York. But she has made her mark on it – staked a claim – and thereby upset the domestic order.

It is the brightness of the yellow – "radiant, bold, unapologetic, unabashed" – that discomposes all that set eyes upon Vanora's drawing room. When her relatives insist that "*nobody* use[s] such a brilliant colour", they are expressing an expert nineteenth-century consensus (22). Charles Eastlake's *Hints on Household Taste*

(1868), recommends that drawing rooms be decorated with "an embossed or cream colour" or, at the most, "with a very small diapered pattern" (Eastlake 1868: 119); and in "Some Hints of Pattern Designing" (1881) William Morris insists that the allure of bright colours, on internal walls, should always be resisted:

> As to the colouring of paperhangings [… it] should above all things be modest; though there are plenty of pigments which might tempt us into making our colour very bright or even very rich, we shall do well to be specially cautious in their use, and not to attempt brightness (Morris 1881: 271).

In *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) Wharton and Codman maintain that there should be nothing "striking or eccentric" about drawing-room décor (Wharton and Codman 1897: 133). Walls should be "subordinate", and should, like those of the Westalls' drawing room in "The Reckoning", form "merely a harmonious but unobtrusive background". Even Charlotte Perkins Gilman deviates from her customary predilection for architectural subversion when she champions "a delicate loveliness in the interiors of our houses" that "enhanc[es] the value of real privacy" (Gilman 1898: 257). If the private sphere is to remain private, it must be politely painted.

Ushered into Vanora's drawing room, St Vincent immediately feels the lack of the "nice tone of grey-blue" that he is quite sure Vanora's sister would have selected (Caird 1892: 22). Clara Haydon, who "would hate to make herself remarkable, or her drawing room yellow", is a "true woman" who, like Wharton's ideal drawing room, is "retiring, unobtrusive, indistinguishable even until you come to know her well" (22-3). But while "true" women stay inside, and preserve their privacy, Vanora flagrantly presumes to compete with the outside:

> The colour had been washed out of the very daffodils, which looked green with jealousy; the sunshine was confronted in a spirit of respectful independence, brotherhood being acknowledged, but the principle of equality uncompromisingly asserted (22).

This is a provocative, "Yellow Nineties" yellow, a decadent yellow that dares to suggest nature may not be superior to artifice. Vanora is not to be "subdued to the conventions of the drawing room", as Lily Bart is in *The House of Mirth* and Julia Westall in "The Reckoning" (12). On the contrary, she is empowered by her discovery that "'you come with your dogma or your self-evident fact, or simply your pot of paint, and, behold, forth spring the various amazements'" (24). And while Clement Westall chooses a

patron's studio to exhibit his unconventional views on marriage, with her outrageous pot of paint Vanora flaunts hers in an environment she has created herself.

In an article entitled "Marriage", published in *Westminster Review* in 1888, it is girls like Clara, rather than girls like Vanora, that Caird warns against. If he is not careful, she writes: "the luckless man" risks saddling himself with a wife "so *very* dutiful and domesticated, and so *very* much confined to her 'proper sphere' that she is, perchance, more exemplary than entertaining" (Caird 1888: 78). Even St Vincent, considerably more conservative than his creator, is not unaware of Clara's possible drawbacks, in comparison with the champion of the "unpardonable" drawing room (Caird 1892: 22). When he is introduced to Vanora he discovers, to his surprise, that "the womanhood of her sisters paled before the exuberant feminine quality I could not but acknowledge" (23). Her gender is not compromised, as her reputation has led him to expect, by her penchant for the conspicuous. Vanora is not trying to masculinise the drawing room when she paints it yellow, as Ann Heilmann has pointed out. She is, rather, transforming "this paradigmatic space of circumscribed and retiring ladyhood into a site of spectacularly subversive femininity" (Heilmann 2004: 213). The problem for St Vincent, though, is the same as the one that confronts Julia Westall in "The Reckoning". Vanora, like Clement Westall, is not content for her subversive views to remain contained by her drawing room. Boasting of a "'joyous sense of drawing in what was outside, and radiating out what was within [her]" (Caird 1892: 28), and cavalierly eschewing "'the sacred realms where woman is queen'" in favour of "'the realms where woman is *not* queen'", she shows no sense of boundary (25-6). It is this that makes her dangerous, as far as St Vincent is concerned. "'This world would be a howling wilderness'", surely, if women were released from houses (26)? It is only the gendered allocation of space that holds off Chaos.

Caird's male characters are not unsympathetically treated, as Stephanie Forward has observed in an article on the "New Man" in *fin-de-siècle* fiction, and St Vincent is no exception (Forward 2000: 448-9). The male characters in Wharton's "The Reckoning" are secure to the point of inflexibility; they have a clear sense of their social place and their right to occupy houses, and also of their place in history. John Arment obstinately inhabits his nineteenth-century drawing room, while Clement Westall, shielded by the New York elite, brings his "advanced" décor and marital code into the new century. St Vincent, on the other hand, is a tortured soul: "a sort of abortive creature, striding between two centuries" (Caird 1892: 30). He is *fin-de-siècle* man,

neither old nor new, touched by a yellow drawing room that has brought "havoc into the citadel of [his] dearest beliefs". And, as it transpires, Vanora is just as tortured. St Vincent "'enthral[s] one part of [her] and leave[s] the other scornful and indifferent'", and the "enthralled" part has rendered her "'miserably dependent'" (29). It is the other part – the "new", twentieth-century woman – that concludes that what St Vincent calls "home" would be to her a "prison", and living with him would "'be like living in a tomb'". Unwilling, in the end, to countenance the dependency that marriage entails, Vanora tears herself away from her suitor, and escapes with her grey-blue sister. Independence, however, is not without its cost. Caird, like Wharton, is concerned for the welfare of women who flout drawing-room convention. Vanora is "white and distraught" as she leaves her father's house, and her future is as uncertain as that of Julia Westall. Unmarried, travelling "abroad", she is not imprisoned, but neither is she housed.

Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1896)

"A sort of abortive creature, striding between two centuries" is an extravagant, epochal image for St Vincent to use to pass judgement on himself for his inability to resolve his own conflicting responses to a yellow drawing room (30). It is an image, perhaps, that reveals the force of human identification with domestic architecture. In *Women and Economics* (1898) Charlotte Perkins Gilman expresses his dilemma, and Vanora's too, when she decries the "gentle dragging hold" of the home, "that few can resist", while simultaneously warning "that those who do resist, and insist upon living their individual lives, find that this costs them loneliness and privation; and they lose so much in daily comfort and affection that others are deterred from following them" (Gilman 1898: 260). St Vincent is more evolved, in his relationship with domestic architecture, than the "undeveloped" John Arment in Wharton's "The Reckoning" (Wharton 1902: 304), but he is not quite bold enough to follow his outrageous girlfriend as she vaults over the obstacles of decorative convention, and lands squarely in the twentieth century. Vanora, on the other hand, has not been cautious enough, and her wilful repudiation of drawing-room protection has left her dangerously exposed to what Berman calls the modern "maelstrom" (16). If Caird's protagonists resist the offending colour, they are aligning themselves with the architectural conventions of an outmoded century. If they acquiesce in it, on the other hand, they risk losing a century's patronage. The distress

of their dilemma is the "thrill and dread" of structural dissolution that, for Marshall Berman, defines modernity (Berman 1982: 13).

The eponymous hero of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is, like St Vincent, caught, suffering, in the junction of two centuries; and, like St Vincent, his response is to form an attachment with conventional architecture. It is a response that is out of step, it would seem, with the inclinations of his community. Marygreen, where Jude Fawley is sent upon the death of his parents, is a village intent on ridding itself of history. Its thatched and dormered houses have been pulled down, their stone and wooden turrets unceremoniously recycled in the manufacture of new roads and pigsties, and its old church has been demolished by "a certain obliterator of historic records who ha[s] run down from London and back in a day" (Hardy 1896: 7). Miraculously, the cottage in which Jude spends the remainder of his childhood has escaped this cold-blooded deconstruction; and, secluded from the outside world, he lives quite comfortably under his great-aunt's "quiet roof" – a secure, permanent house with a name ("Drusilla Fawley, Baker") and opaque, age-oxidised windows (8). It is, however, not architecturally august enough for the adult Jude. It houses his "outer being" only, it seems to him, and is incapable of containing the academic aspirations which, "as gigantic as his surroundings [are] small", drive his growing desire to escape Marygreen (20). Tellingly, the terms in which Jude expresses these aspirations are not, as might be expected, those of flight but, rather, of cleaving. He yearns for "something to anchor on, to cling to – for some place which he could call admirable": not for the open air, but for a different kind of architecture (24). The colleges of Christminster, it seems to him, have established foundations and solid walls that promise to withstand his clinging grasp. Gaining entry may prove a problem – a baker's great-nephew, after all, is not likely to achieve much by simply "knocking at the doors of these strongholds of learning" (39). Jude resolves instead, therefore, to effect a more literal impact on academic structure, by training as a builder.

Jude soon finds his way to Christminster blocked, however, by domesticity's "dragging hold" (Gilman 1898: 260). His first meetings with Arabella Donn are safely outdoors. It is the open down to which she leads him, with customary canniness, early in their courtship: high ground where no-one is visible in the "empty surrounding space", but where the "ecclesiastical romance in stone" that is Christminster remains reassuringly in view (Hardy 1896: 60). To secure him, though, Arabella knows she must house him. Dispatching her parents because, as she tells them, she "'can't get un

to come in when you are here'", she lures Jude inside (62). A world away from the "romance" that shimmers in the distance, domestic architecture is actual, earthy – even animal. Enclosed by walls that reek of the adjoining pigsties, Jude is trapped by the "erotolepsy" that always serves to distract him from his scholarly aspirations, and subsequently accommodated, with Arabella and a pig, in a marital home that she smears with pork fat, before deserting him (117). It is not until three years after the breakdown of his marriage, via a stonemasonry apprenticeship, that Jude finally arrives in Christminster.

Had Jude stuck to his original career plan – to be a builder – he would have been joining those who, in the background of the novel, can be seen creating the structures (roads, music halls, hotels, railway stations) of a new century. Attractive as these structures are, though, it worries Jude that they offer no footholds to secure his access to the past. Stonemasonry, it seems to him, is a more conducive profession. It is this decision – to repair old structures, rather than construct new ones – that hinders him from embracing the new century, and ultimately leads to his downfall. The skills he has acquired in the apprenticeship include carving, moulding and lettering – writing on the walls he has hoped one day to breach. He is able to read walls too, and there are plenty for him to read. Christminster offers "numberless architectural pages", which he expertly scans, "feeling with his fingers the contours of their mouldings and carvings" (99, 94). This very close reading has given him such a command of architectural language, indeed, that "he probably knew more about those buildings materially, artistically, and historically, than any one of their inmates" (102). But the wall ("only a wall – but what a wall!") that divides him from those inmates remains forbiddingly solid. It is, I suggest, Jude's mode of study that is the problem. He is reading walls not as an "artist-critic", like those admitted inside them, but as an "artisan and comrade" of those that crafted them (94). As a stonemason he is impotent, able only to tinker with their outside; and, for an aspiring scholar, the outside is the wrong side.

A further problem, for Jude, is that Christminster's glister, when viewed from such close quarters, begins to seem tarnished. It is impossible now for him to dismiss the verdict of the villagers he has left behind in Marygreen, for whom Christminster is nothing more than a cluster of "'auld crumbling buildings'" (135). The walls may be "reverend", but he notices they also have an "extinct air" which is "accentuated by the rottenness of the stones" (94). The colleges, he begins to suspect, are ivory towers – "carcases" for containing scholars – and it seems out of the question that "modern

thought could house itself in such decrepit and superseded chambers" (37, 94). At one point it occurs to him that renovation work may offer an acceptable compromise between old and new architecture. The stone yard he comes across is a cheerful "centre of regeneration", and he is attracted by the "precision, mathematical straightness, smoothness, exactitude" of the new stones – juxtaposed, as they are, with the "jagged curves, disdain of precision, irregularity, disarray" of the old walls (100). They offer "ideas in modern prose", it seems to him, "which the lichened colleges presented in old poetry". Appealingly flawless though renovated architecture is, however, Jude quickly decides that what the stone yard offers is "at best only copying, patching and imitating", and rejects the job. It is a nineteenth-century purism. John Ruskin denounces renovation as "a Lie from beginning to end" in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), which can only cover up "a necessity for destruction". "Pull the building down", he beseeches: "throw its stones into neglected corners, make ballast of them, or mortar, if you will; but do it honestly, and do not set up a Lie in their place" (Ruskin 1849: 196). Ruskinism, though, is not the position of the novel. When Jude turns his back on the stone yard the narrator interjects, to point out his naivety:

> He did not at that time see that medievalism was as dead as a fern-leaf in a lump of coal; that other developments were shaping in the world around him, in which Gothic architecture and its associations had no place. The deadly animosity of contemporary logic and vision towards so much of what he held in reverence was not yet revealed to him (Hardy 1896: 101).

Jude is wedded to old architectural principles, and, tragically, they will always impede his progression to the modern world. It is clear that the narrator does not lack sympathy for Jude's penchant for old architecture. There is a certain brutality, as far as he is concerned, in modern theoretical attitudes to gothic architecture. He shares Jude's distaste, too, for the "modern chapels, modern tombs, and modern shrubs" of Stoke-Barehills, which have "a look of intrusiveness amid the crumbling and ivy-coloured decay of the ancient walls" (344), and he shudders with him at the red brick house inhabited by the composer who thinks nothing of creating supremely moving harmonies before, without a backward glance, giving up music for the wine trade (231-3). The impressive practicality of modern architecture, however, cannot be ignored. As the householder retorts when Jude compliments the "'nice little cottage'" where he and Sue Bridehead seek shelter: "'O, I don't know about the niceness. I shall have to thatch it soon, and where the thatch is to come from I can't tell, for straw do get that dear, and

'twill soon be cheaper to cover your house wi' chainey plates than thatch" (164). There is no place for sentiment in the modern world. While Jude mopes over the decaying colleges, there are "great palpitating centres" of life in Christminster – modern buildings such as the inn, "gutted and newly arranged throughout", where he rediscovers Arabella (213). Jude is dazzled by its "spacious and inviting entrance", its "mahogany fixtures", "stuffed sofa-benches", "screens of ground glass in mahogany framing", "white-handled beer-engines", and "row of little silvered taps inside, dripping into a pewter trough". A similarly modern inn in Henry James's *Princess Casamassima* (1886) is described as "brutal" and "garish"; with "stodgy" decorations, a "deluge of gaslight", "glittering brass and pewter", and "lumpish woodwork and false colours" – a building "detestable" to both protagonist and narrator (James 1886: 119). *Jude*'s gleaming inn, on the contrary, is exuberantly appealing, its dripping silvered taps so much sexier than the tools of a stonemason, or the scholars' pens and books.

As well as modern architecture, Jude is attracted by temporary, mobile structures. The baker's cart in which he studies, the trains in which he travels, and the marquees and booths of the itinerant exhibitions he visits, are rural versions of what Anthony Vidler calls the "vagabond architecture" which has, since the nineteenth century, offered a "critique of conventional monumentality, of fixed urban architecture, in favour of the mobile and the nomadic" (Vidler 1992: 207). They break, briefly, the shackles that bind Jude to architecture. For two and a half years he and Sue experiment with "a shifting, almost nomadic life, which was not without its pleasantness for a time", but the couple's wanderings – from Melchester to Shaston, Shaston to Aldbrickham, Aldbrickham to "Elsewhere" do not suit Jude (Hardy 1896: 367). "Elsewhere" is a very long way from "Drusilla Fawley, Baker", and his health rapidly declines when deprived of permanent, material shelter. Still "under stress of his old idea", to root himself in a university town, Jude returns to Christminster. Here, taking a room that is heavily overshadowed by the "four centuries of gloom, bigotry and decay" of Sarcophagus College, he again finds himself so close to academia that "only a thickness of wall divided them" (392). Actually he is as far removed from it "as if it had been on opposite sides of the globe", but he does not hear the "freezing negative that those scholared walls had echoed to his desire" (393-4, 397). He still hopes the distance between "this side" and "the other side" of an academic wall is short enough for a stonemason to step across.

While Jude clings so closely to old architecture, Sue is consistently oppressed by it. The panelled walls and beamed ceilings of her marital home make her feel, she tells Jude, "'crushed into the earth by the weight of so many lives there spent'", and the narrator confirms that "the centuries did, indeed, ponderously overhang a young wife who passed her time [t]here" (241, 246). History does not disperse, in houses; it simply accumulates mass. And it is not just houses that tyrannise Sue. All forms of architecture, it seems to her, are heavy with history, and sodden with convention. Having worked as a designer for an ecclesiastical warehouse, her grasp of architectural principles is as secure as Jude's, and she knows with what human attributes the nineteenth century has imbued old walls. As Ruskin asserts in an aphorism in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*: "The greatest glory of a building is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, or stern watching […], of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity" (Ruskin 1849: 186-7). It is the "stern watching" of an elderly relative, and it is just this uncompromising moral censure that Sue finds intolerable. Openly challenging Jude's allegiance to Gothic Revival architecture which, she argues, is a "'barbaric art'", that upholds outdated mores, she urges him to break away from old walls, and to work instead on modern constructions that, because they have "'no connection with conduct'", are more suited to the new century (Hardy 1896: 364). As for academic buildings, she experiences the Melchester Training School as a "species of nunnery", rather than the emancipatory environment she has been led to expect (167). After a spell in which she is locked in solitary confinement under suspicion of sexual transgression, she escapes academia by jumping out of one its illustrious mullioned windows – a window against which Jude's ardent nose has been pressed his entire adult life.

But it is marital architecture that provokes the most acute recoil. Sue, like the Westalls in Wharton's "The Reckoning", is an exponent of the "New Ethics", and regards herself as a marital pioneer. It seems to her that marriage is a horrific moral anachronism, a "barbarous" custom with which she hopes future generations will dispense (256). She balks at the threshold of the Registrar's Office where she goes to marry Jude, because the floor is "stained by previous visitors" (337). While railway stations and music halls gleam as hygienically as Arabella's pub, marital architecture, to one of Sue's modern sensibility, seems irretrievably besmirched by history. It is also, she learns, besmirched by sex. As a young woman (and a fledgling New Woman) she had no premonition of the dangers of housing. Invited to live with a Christminster

undergraduate, she looked forward with pleasure to "sharing a sitting room" (177). It turns out, though, that "living with" meant "'quite a different thing'" to the undergraduate than it meant to Sue. Alarmingly, as it transpired, he was anticipating a sexual relationship. For Sue there is no inevitable equivalence between "living with" and sex. As Jude discerns when he watches her depart for Richard Phillotson's house, "'She does not realise what marriage means!'" (206). When she later leaves Phillotson for Jude who, not unreasonably, checks them into a double hotel room, she repeats what she said to the Christminster undergraduate: "'But I didn't mean that!'" (285). For the best part of a year Sue lives with Jude "as a fellow-lodger and friend", in the same house but on different floors, or in rooms safely separated by a landing (211). She likes sharing houses with men; it is sharing rooms she finds so dangerous. The problem is that Sue is the only character in the novel (or indeed, the narrator implies, the world) who does *not* automatically link shared housing and sex. She is expelled from the training college because its governors cannot conceive that she has spent a chaste night in a cottage with Jude. When she asks Phillotson if she can "live away" from him or, failing that, live in his house but "in a separate way", his confused response is: "'What then was the meaning of marrying at all?'" (265, 268). To be married and to live separately is, for Phillotson, a serious disruption of signification. When Jude brings Sue back to his Christminster lodgings after the death of their children, and finds himself again rejected at his bedroom door, his bafflement is a match for Phillotson's: "'But Sue! Don't we live here?'" (421). He expects sex and housing to be interchangeable. Lodging with Arabella, after all, results in sex *every time*. It is Sue's recognition of this, indeed, that finally leads her to submit to Jude – a submission that would not have happened, she admits, had not "'envy stimulated me to oust Arabella'" (422). To be married is to be "'loved on the premises'" by one's husband. "'Ugh', says Sue: "How horrible and sordid!'" (308). Her objections to marriage, as it turns out, are not those of a moral pioneer, but those of a woman with a preference for celibacy.

Sex, as Sue discovers, is not simply a requirement of an outdated institution. Modern marriage demands it too. The Phillotson bedroom is lined with the same "heavy, gloomy" wainscoting as the rest of the house, and there is a "massive" old chimney-piece to add to the tyranny of architectural history (262). But in the middle of the room, standing in "cold contrast" to the ancient surroundings, is the "new and shining brass bedstead". Contrasting they may be, but the old and new styles seem "to nod to each other across three centuries upon the shaking floor", joining forces to

intimidate Sue with her horrific marital duties (263). Some feminist critics, disturbed by Sue's sexual frigidity, have made stringent attempts to deny it. Rosemarie Morgan, for example, claims that she is "less frigid than refrigerated" (by Jude) (Morgan 1988: 259), and Rosemary Sumner ignores Sue's clenched teeth to argue that her return to Phillotson's bed suggests a "terrifying sex-drive" (Sumner 2000: 102). Carla Peterson blames D.H. Lawrence's "narrow, patriarchal interpretation of the novel" for the subsequent overlooking of this supposed sex drive (Peterson 2000: 83). But what Lawrence actually observes, in his "Study of Thomas Hardy" (1914), is Sue's compulsive, over-evolved desire to escape her body. He argues that she is the product of centuries of "pure Christianity", of "insisting on the supremacy and bodilessness of Love", and so successful has she been at detaching spirit from body that she is now stranded "on the topmost pinnacle, exposed to all the horrors and the magnificence of space" (Lawrence 1914: 115-16). Like Marshall Berman, Lawrence has observed that one of the responses to the modern dissolution of solidity is to thrill to it. Sue Bridehead, though, has gone a step further, and opted to dissolve with it. So successful has she been that she has reduced herself to a mere "point of consciousness", and now teeters, "like one swooned at a great height, held up at the tip of a fine pinnacle that drove upwards into nothingness". Far from being "narrow" and "patriarchal" I suggest Lawrence's interpretation of *Jude* is a perfectly convincing engagement with the text. Morgan's "less frigid than refrigerated" verdict is based on Jude's repeated denials of Sue's physicality; and there are, it is true, a great many of these denials. Jude calls her, variously, an "aerial being", a "spirit", a "disembodied creature", a "tantalising phantom", "hardly flesh at all", "ethereal", the "least sensual woman I ever knew to exist without inhuman sexlessness", and "a sort of fay or sprite – not a woman!" (Hardy 1896: 259, 292, 412, 422); but it is not just Jude who describes Sue in these terms. The narrator uses similar language when he depicts her as an "ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl", who walks so daintily "she hardly touched ground, and as if a moderately strong puff of wind would float her over the hedge into the next field" (261, 347). Mrs Edlin, too, admonishes her: "Pshoo – you've got no body to speak of! You put me more in mind of a sperrit" (472). Towards the end of the novel Sue begins, literally, to disappear. The strain of her re-marriage, says the narrator, "preyed upon her flesh and bones, and she appeared smaller in outline than she had formerly done" (441). And, as Roxanne Jurta points out in an article in which she disqualifies *Jude the*

Obscure from the "New Woman Novel" category to which it is sometimes admitted, in the closing scenes Sue vanishes from the text entirely (Jurta 1999: 20).

Lawrence's sympathies are with Jude, as he imagines how it must have been for him "when he rose from taking Sue" (Lawrence 1914: 117). He must have felt, he says, "that he walked in a ghastly blank, confronted just by space, void". The "huge yawn" that is Wells's invisible man, whose story was published the year after *Jude*, inspires similar horror in all that encounter him (Wells 1897: 11). There is something disordered about those who thrill to vacancy which, in Sue's case, is prompted by a disgust for human reproduction. Her vision of a future in which "weltering humanity" is so "hideously multiplied" that subsequent generations will shrink from perpetuating it, is apparently realised in the person of "Little Father Time", her step-son, who, indeed, carries Sue's distaste for form one step further (Hardy 1896: 341). "'I don't like Christminster'", he says, claustrophobically shrinking from the college walls: "'Are the great old houses gaols?'" (393). Appalled by crowds, and increasingly anxious that there is no room for his family, he hangs himself and his half-siblings because "'we are too menny'" (401). It is the action, says the doctor called by Jude, of "'the coming universal wish not to live'" (402). Little Father Time's solution to Sue's dilemma – how to live with people without touching them – is not to live anywhere.

Wells's invisible man successfully disposes of his body, and is never comfortable again. *The Invisible Man*, indeed, is the tale of his subsequent search for accommodation. Unfortunately for Griffin, doors, locks and bolts prove the hostile community's most successful weapon against him, and "houses everywhere [are] barred against him" (Wells 1897: 127). It is not safe, it seems, to be so ethereal. Sue Bridehead, too, is not unaware of architecture's protective potential. To escape Phillotson's dreadful bed she retreats, at one point, to his linen cupboard, where she makes "a little nest for herself". But, as she learned years before in the undergraduate's sitting room, interiors are not necessarily places of safety. Doors in *Jude* are not the "effectual barrier[s]" upon which Wharton and Codman insist in *The Decoration of Houses* (Wharton and Codman 1897: 107). There is "no lock or other fastening" on the cupboard door – nothing to arrest the progress of her husband who, when he finds her, "seize[s] the knob", and pulls (Hardy 1896: 263). The string with which she has tried to fasten it breaks immediately, to expose Sue in all her vulnerability. Remembering her request "to live in a separate way" (a request to which he accedes as a direct result of this incident), Phillotson obligingly suggests she lock her bedroom door to prevent

accidental intrusion. "'I have tried!'", she replies, desperately: "'It won't lock. All the doors are out of order'" (271). No-one ever has to knock to gain entry to Phillotson's house, as his friend Gillingham remarks, and Sue finds Jude's lodgings just as disconcertingly accessible (280). At Melchester, indeed, Jude goes out of his way to assure himself that she can "enter easily enough, the front door being opened merely by a knob which anybody could turn" (172). For Sue, a door without a lock is "out of order" and through it, all too easily, sexual demand can barge. Windows, on the other hand, offer more effective sexual protection. On more than one occasion, at moments of threatened physical contact, she uses an open casement window as a barrier between herself and Jude. It allows her to speak to him outside, while she is semi-contained inside. Knowing that she is only "visible down to her waist", she is emboldened to "indulg[e] in a frankness she had feared at close quarters", and even to allow limited physical contact (a "hand upon his", or a "scarcely perceptible kiss upon the top of his head"), while continuing to restrict her sexual availability (244, 255, 257). As if to prove her power over windows, when she shuts the casement Jude obediently returns to his cottage. And, of course, as the narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" also observes, when all else fails it is always possible to jump out of a window (Gilman 1892: 46). Sue's escape from the training college proves a mere rehearsal for her spectacular leap from Phillotson's bedroom window.

As the Invisible Man, Julia Westall and Sue Bridehead all discover, the price that has to be paid for defying boundaries, whether somatic or architectural, is exposure. The moment they set foot outdoors Sue and Jude are subjected to the gaze of onlookers from upper windows. Their "personal histories and past conduct" are discussed to an "intolerable extent" at a furniture sale they hold when local disapproval forces them to leave Aldbrickham; and the door of their room is tried repeatedly despite the large "Private" sign Jude hangs on its outside (Hardy 1896: 363). As their housing becomes increasingly temporary, lack of privacy becomes more of an issue, and Sue's claustrophobia begins to mutate to its converse. Until now she has found it no more necessary than Caird's Vanora or Wharton's Westalls to hide her views on unhappy marriage. "'Why surely a person may say'", she exclaims to Jude: "'even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her?'" (250). But a housetop is a very exposed place, as Julia and Vanora discover to their cost. Protected by an elite social group, Clement Westall can revel in conspicuousness, but Sue, like Westall's wife, fast becomes its victim. Helping Jude renovate a church, she finds herself "in

relief against the white walls", exhibited for the village women below and their speculations about her marital status; and privacy is far from guaranteed even when she is on the other side of the wall (358). After the children's death she grieves inside her lodging-house, but the sightseers come to gaze anyway: "apparently counting the window-panes and the stones of the walls" in the absence of a sighting of the couple upon whose "real relations" the newspapers have cast doubt (406). So tainted is the house by its occupants' "exasperating notoriety", that the landlord feels obliged to change its number; and ultimately it is in agoraphobic recoil from publicity that Sue submits to her rehousing by Phillotson.

Phillotson's doors have always been well-oiled, and Sue's access to the "house and hearthstone" of her first marriage is considerably smoother than that of Julia Westall to Arment's (434) The driver tells her he found the house open when he delivered her luggage, and Sue herself "lift[s] the latch of the dwelling without knocking" (435). Having failed to escape either body or house, she decides to bring the former into "complete subjection" while enslaving herself to the latter, "disciplin[ing]" herself with household duties to which she has no affinity (466, 472). In a final act of self-flagellation she knocks at Phillotson's bedroom door and, "visibly shudder[ing]", "beg[s] to be admitted" (474-5). Phillotson puts up some gentlemanly opposition. "'Having you back in the house was one thing – this another'" he protests, reminding her of her former uncoupling of "living with" and sex. But, on her insistence, he leads her into the room, and lays her on the huge, merciless marital bed.

In *Jude,* as in "The Reckoning", houses of first marriages have a tendency to haunt and, for Jude, the piggery is never far away. Once Sue has returned to Phillotson it does not take Arabella long to find Jude's Christminster lodging, and to house him in a pork shop. Luring him to its upper room with alcohol and the promise of shelter, she triumphantly declares to her father: "'I've got a prize upstairs […] a husband almost'" (452). All that remains to be done, it seems, is to "'keep him jolly and cheerful here for a day or two, and not let him go back to his lodging'" (453). Arabella does not participate in the Fawleys' anxious grappling with the marriage question. She walks easily into and out of marriages without troubling herself with their validity, or even their legality. Marriage has practical advantages, as she says to Sue:

> 'Life with a man is more business-like after it, and money matters work better. And then, you see, if you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get

> the law to protect you, which you can't otherwise, unless he half runs you through with a knife, or cracks your noddle with a poker' (320).

It is advice that Julia Westall, emphatically evicted from two marital homes, would perhaps have valued. Arabella has authority over doors, unlike Julia or Sue. She always has her own latchkey (or, if not, knows where keys can be found), and easily moves in and out of her father's, husbands' and friends' houses, as well as her own lodgings. Unlike Sue, whose overnight stays never go overlooked, she is proud that "'nobody will think anything of my staying out'" (219). When she succeeds in marrying Jude for a second time, she proudly displays her wedding ring to her assembled friends: "'There's the padlock, see'" (459). It is not she that is padlocked by marriage, however, but Jude.

Arabella's relationship with furniture is as relaxed as her relationship with doors. She acquires it easily, by marrying into it or picking it up at agricultural fairs, but is equally happy to discard it, without a backward glance, at public auctions. Other characters struggle to extricate themselves from furniture. For Phillotson it is "impedimenta", three-quarters of which he tries to offload onto Sue when she leaves him (5). "'I don't want to be bothered with it'", he tells her: "'I have a sort of affection for a little of it that belonged to my poor mother and father. But the rest you are welcome to whenever you like to send for it'" (279). Of course Sue, whose project is always to escape the material, refuses his offer. Jude, on the other hand, is as attracted by furniture as he is by old architecture. It weighs him down, but also serves him as an anchor. Anxious, before he marries Arabella, that he is "without a stick of furniture", he is equally anxious when, at their separation, the furniture he has acquired "disappear[s] in the wake of his wife" (71, 103). Later he is terribly encumbered by his dead aunt's "ancient and lumbering goods", but is nevertheless distressed to see it put under the auctioneer's hammer (305). Arabella recognises that furniture, like marriage, has its uses. Indeed she recommends both to Sue, on the grounds that "'if he bolts away from you – I say it friendly, as woman to woman, for there's never knowing what a man med do – you'll have the sticks o' furniture, and won't be looked upon as a thief'" (320). It is Jude's attachment to furniture that Arabella exploits to lure him to her room above the pork shop. Bewildered to see his possessions mingled with hers, Jude "scarcely considered how they had come there, or what their coming signalised" (454). What the coming of his furniture "signalises", in fact, is his entrapment. It is Arabella's *fait accompli*.

As Jude and Sue, like St Vincent in "The Yellow Drawing Room", trudge miserably between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their discomfort is reflected in their disordered relationship with architecture. Jude, consistently denied access to education by old architecture, is nevertheless unable ever to loosen his grasp on it; and, although Sue strives valiantly to escape both architecture and history, she too eventually succumbs to their "dragging hold" (Gilman 1898: 260). Arabella, on the other hand, demonstrates a healthy lack of respect for old architecture, which considerably reduces its authority over her. While Jude lies dying at home she effortlessly enters the college that has so consistently denied him access, simply by nodding to a workman; and she eats another of the colleges (made by Jude, from gingerbread), "unceremoniously munching" its towers, pinnacles and traceried windows (Hardy 1896: 371). Whether she is outside academic walls, inside them, or they are inside her, it is all the same to Arabella; and her relationship with domestic architecture is just as free of phobia. When she demands lodging with Jude she shows none of Sue's agitation about failing locks, and makes a "palace" of his clothes closet (445). She is just as much at home outside as inside, and shows no discomfort as she mingles with a Christminster crowd so numerous it is "literally jammed into one hot mass" (487). Arabella does not share Sue's horror of "weltering humanity", nor Julia Westall's shrinking from the vulgar crowd. She has no need of architectural protection, because she is at home everywhere. Perfectly adapted, she has full access to the modern world.

The houses where Wharton's, Caird's and Hardy's characters conduct their conjugal experiments are far from neutral territory. Their foundations cling to history; their doors allow access, or deny it, according to ancient rules; and their stripped modern surfaces barely contain the traditional, ornamental features they try so hard to conceal. The fictional house, at this point in the century, is a profoundly conservative structure, and characters' relationship with it, as I have demonstrated, depends on their attitude to modernity. If structural dissolution threatens them, they cleave to it; if it tempts them, they shrink from it, or sometimes deface it. The Arments and the Westalls, Vanora and her tortured lover, Jude and Sue, all display the conflicting impulses that Berman associates with the modern sensibility; and the character who is likeliest to survive his "maelstrom" is one who occupies the middle ground. Hardy's Arabella allies herself with architecture and its contents without enslaving herself to it, and this, as the thesis will demonstrate, is a useful strategy for a twentieth-century protagonist to

adopt. Architecture's loyalty to orthodoxy is infrangible, and it will always be worth keeping it onside.

2.

"I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it": Modernism Indoors

The tributaries that feed Marshall Berman's "modern maelstrom" are scientific discovery and industrialisation; corporate power and class struggle; demographic upheaval and urban growth; mass communication and a distended, unstable capitalist world market (Berman 1982: 16). To be modernist, Berman contends, is to make oneself at home in the maelstrom: "to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows" (345-6). This chapter, though, will test a conflicting hypothesis, offered by Michael Levenson in "From the Closed Room to an Opening Sky", an essay on T.S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Wyndham Lewis, that "modernism begins in a room" (Levenson 2007: 2). It will apply Levenson's hypothesis to four avant-garde texts in which domestic architecture is employed specifically to shut the maelstrom out; and will demonstrate that the modernist author is as likely to detach his protagonist from the world as he is to send him out into its "fervid and perilous flow". By sitting him in a room, the author is able to experiment on him, observe him, and explore what it is to exist uninterrupted, and perhaps uncorrupted, by events beyond the closed door. In these texts the external universe is reduced to a room, while human consciousness is simultaneously allowed to spread beyond the limits of the skull, and to play in the space the room affords. Internal walls, meanwhile, become objects of intense interest – epistemological and ontological – to protagonists who scrutinise them as surfaces to be deciphered, and structures to be challenged.

In her *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (2005) Victoria Rosner turns her critical attention away from the turbulence and romance of modern urban spaces, and claims domestic space as "a generative site for literary modernism" (Rosner 2005: 2). Her close readings of the life writing of Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf, and also of the fiction of Woolf, E.M. Forster and other British modernists, re-evaluate domesticity in avant-garde writing, and claim the inside as a space of radicalism. What interests Rosner, in particular, is the use to which rooms are put. James Joyce's representation of Leopold Bloom using the toilet, for example, demonstrates that modernist walls are considerably more permissive than their Victorian counterparts; and when Woolf tells an anecdote of Lytton Strachey's utterance of the word "semen"

in a Bloomsbury drawing room (Woolf 1922: 56), it is an "epochal" moment in which "the restrictions on drawing-room conduct collapse and semen (figuratively) floods the room" (Rosner 2005: 89). When Levenson claims that "modernism begins in a room", however, he is not envisaging a drawing room. A drawing room is, after all, as Edith Wharton recognised, really rather a *public* private space. Levenson argues, rather, that often the modernist response to the late nineteenth-century fetishisation of the decorated house is to retreat still further inside: "beyond the cluttered drawing room, into the curtained alcove, the shuttered cabinet, the interior's own interior" (Levenson 2007: 4). The modernist room pays no attention to what should, or should not, be uttered within its walls. "Typically single and self-contained", it is, according to Levenson, "not a house for a family, [but] a box for a brain" (5).

Levenson opens his "From the Closed Room to an Opening Sky" with a series of examples of the modernist room. It includes Christopher Tietjens's officer's hut in Ford Madox Ford's *No More Parades* (1925), Clarissa Dalloway's bedroom (1925), and the attic bedroom in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). The first text to be analysed in this chapter is the latter. The decision to place Gilman's story here, rather than in the first chapter (it was published in the same year as Mona Caird's "The Yellow Drawing Room"), is based partly on the conviction that its representation of the subjective life of the anonymous narrator as a "stream of consciousness" qualifies it as a modernist text, and partly on the focus of this chapter, which is the unusually intense relationship between protagonist and room. The other three texts to be analysed are Henri Barbusse's *Hell* (1908), in which an anonymous voyeur becomes obsessed with a hole in the wall between his hotel room and the room next door; Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" (1917), in which an anonymous woman speculates upon an unidentified mark on her living room wall, and Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), in which a man (turned insect) is confined, or perhaps confines himself, to his bedroom. The chapter will engage with Rosner's *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* and Levenson's "From the Closed Room to an Opening Sky", and also draw on contemporary writing by Le Corbusier, William Morris, D.H. Lawrence, and others, to argue that when Gertrude Stein (through Alice) declares in *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* (1933) "I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it", it is not an exceptional position for a twentieth-century author to take (Stein 1933: 7). The chapter will also raise a question about this sedentary stance – a question that will be further explored later in the thesis. In the interests of

surviving the modern maelstrom, this cold-shouldering of the external universe is an understandable strategy for the twentieth-century protagonist to employ; but is it, ultimately, one that the author endorses?

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892)

In his "Kindergarten Chats", written as though from a master builder to his pupil in the periodical *Interstate Architect and Builder* in 1901, Louis Sullivan celebrates the "reality" of architecture – the "ten-fingered grasp of things it implies" (Sullivan 1901: 75). Reliably material, it is, he says: "as a man […] strong, sound and sane". Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" opens with an acknowledgement of this orthodox alignment of architecture, sanity, and masculinity. The house in which its narrator is to be cured of her hysteria is described as a "hereditary estate", a "colonial mansion", and an "ancestral hall" – a patriarchal house, shored up by history (Gilman 1892: 31). The rest cure has been prescribed by her husband, who is also her physician. "Practical in the extreme", John expresses "an intense horror of superstition", and "scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures". To return his wife to sanity, it seems, he must reassert the authority of objective reality, and protect her from ideas. There is no better way to achieve this, as far as he is concerned, than to confine her to a house. "The Yellow Wallpaper", though, is not simply a gothic tale of the architectural oppression of a wife by her husband. Gilman's crusade for material reform was nothing if not even-handed. The separation of "The Yellow Wallpaper"'s narrator from the world, in particular her separation from the world of work, weighs heavily on her; but so too does its effect on her husband. Her expectations of wifehood were to be "such a help to John, such a rest and comfort", and yet here she has proved herself "a comparative burden already!" (34). The house, Gilman always insisted in her polemical writing, binds both sexes with its "gentle, dragging hold" – its powerful magnetism operating on men through the economic and physical dependence of their wives (Gilman 1898: 260). In *The Home* (1903) she challenges arbitrary linguistic couplings such as "housewife", which seem to her nonsensical: "A house does not need a wife any more than it does a husband. Are we never to have a man-wife? A really suitable and profitable companion for a man instead of the bond-slave of a house?" (Gilman 1903: 100-1). John and his wife could *together* contribute to a unified world, she contends, if they could but shed their house.

Instead, however, John incarcerates his wife in a nursery; or, rather, "it was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls" (Gilman 1892: 33). The collective nurseries proposed by Gilman in *Concerning Children* (1903) include just such rooms – Rousseauian spaces adapted to meet children's developmental needs. Fitted with "large soft ropes, running across here and there, within reach of the eager, strong little hands", they would be located upstairs, as near as possible to the roof (Gilman 1903: 130). As a nursery, the attic room inhabited by the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" – "big" and "airy", with "sunshine galore" – perfectly meets Gilman's specifications (Gilman 1892: 33). In fact, though, the narrator has been separated from her baby, and infantilised by her husband. The nursery has become *unheimlich*: its disordered children have "ravaged", even "gnawed" it – tearing wallpaper, excavating plaster, and scratching, gouging and splintering the floor (36). The "rings and things" that once signified children's space have now been transformed, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe in their analysis of "The Yellow Wallpaper" in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), into "the paraphernalia of confinement" for an adult woman (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 90). John's wife is trapped in the wrong room.

The narrator's health is being overseen by a bevy of doctors, including her husband. Her brother, "also a physician, and also of high standing", endorses John's prescriptions of cod liver oil, tonics and idleness (Gilman 1892: 31). Both are disciples of the neurologist Dr Silas Weir Mitchell who, as the architect of the rest cure, is "just like John and my brother, only more so!" (37). The attic is intended to contribute to the cure, but the narrator herself experiences it as a space of ill health – as, literally, a sick room. That the sickness seems to emanate from the wallpaper is consistent with contemporary views on decoration. Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, for example, pronounced in 1897 that wallpaper was "objectionable on sanitary grounds", and "it was well for the future of house decoration when medical science declared itself against the use of wall-papers" (Wharton and Codman 1897: 45); and anxieties about wallpaper were not just about hygiene. As Tom Lutz points out in *American Nervousness* (1981), his anecdotal history of neurasthenia in *fin-de-siècle* America, there were also concerns about the toxicity of wallpaper dyes, especially red and yellow, which contained arsenic (Lutz 1981: 230). At one point in "The Yellow Wallpaper" the narrator announces her suspicion that the whole household is "secretly affected" after "sleeping under this paper for three months" (Gilman 1892: 45). Its "vicious influence", she believes,

originates in its colour (35). A "repellent, almost revolting […] smouldering unclean yellow", the wallpaper's "sickly sulphur tint" reminds her "of all the yellow things I ever saw – not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old, foul, bad yellow things" (33, 40, 42). Eventually the walls begin to discharge their yellowness in a yellow stain, and in a "creeping", "hovering", "skulking", "peculiar", "yellow" smell – a yellow miasma that pervades the interior (42, 43). Ann Heilmann has argued that this yellowness represents *fin de siècle* decadence (Heilmann 2000: 175-88): Susan Lanser that it represents imperialist anxiety (Lanser 1989: 415-41); and Mary Jacobus that it is the "stain or whiff" of both female sensuality and male hysteria (Jacobus 1986: 241). Whether it signifies any of these, or all of them, yellow is the colour of obscenity and horror, and it is inside.

Noxious as the colour of the wallpaper may be, however, it is apparently the "torturing" pattern that has the more disastrous effect on the narrator's mental health (Gilman 1892: 240). Late nineteenth-century theorists of decoration repeatedly alert their readers to the influence of wallpaper pattern on state of mind. William Morris worries in "Some Hints on Pattern-Designing" (originally a lecture delivered in 1881) that wallpaper designers themselves "have a great tendency to go mad", and speculates that the reason for this is that "the constant designing of recurring patterns is a very harassing business" (Morris 1881: 280). "We cannot always be having our emotions deeply stirred: that wearies us body and soul", he insists in the same lecture (258); and in another ("The Lesser Arts", delivered in 1887) he argues that the purpose of wallpaper pattern should only be to "amuse, soothe, or elevate the mind in a healthy state" (Morris 1887: 251). For Gilman, the nervous irritability that "we are all familiar with in women" is the result of a failure in perspective caused by their restricted view (Gilman, 1903: 174). "The constant study of near objects, with no distant horizon to test and change the focus", she argues in *The Home*, "makes us short-sighted; and as we all know, the smallest object is large if you hold it near enough" (173-4). Confined to her attic, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" seems to dramatise Gilman's point. She has nothing better to do than myopically peer at the wallpaper, where she finds "there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to the normal mind" (Gilman 1892: 40). Wharton and Codman would not have been surprised by such psychic disturbance. In *The Decoration of Houses* they insist upon order in wallpaper pattern, proclaiming: "If proportion is the good breeding of architecture, symmetry, or the answering of one part to another, may be defined as the sanity of decoration"

(Wharton and Codman 1897: 35). It is a sanity "The Yellow Wallpaper"'s pattern lacks. Its "lame uncertain curves […] plunge off at outrageous angles", the narrator complains, and "destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions" (Gilman 1892: 33); it "slaps you in the face, knocks you down and tramples upon you" (41). Morris warns in "Some Hints" that wallpaper designers find it almost impossible to avoid making accidental lines, which are "very apt to turn up when a pattern is repeated over a wall" (Morris 1881: 271). Of these "vertical lines are the worst", he contends; "diagonal ones are pretty bad, and horizontal ones do not so much matter". But for Gilman's increasingly distressed narrator they are all as bad as one another. It is impossible to keep up with them. She follows the "bloated curves and flourishes" of the vertical lines, which "go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity"; then notices that "on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing seaweeds in full chase"; then, finally, that "the whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself in trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction" (Gilman 1892: 37-8). Morris finally advises: "Have papers with pretty patterns if you like them, but if you don't I beg of you, quite seriously, to have nothing to do with them, but whitewash your wall and be done with it" (Morris 1881: 271). Interestingly, John makes a similar suggestion in "The Yellow Wallpaper": "Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down to the cellar, if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain" (Gilman 1892: 34). His apparent sympathy, however, is nullified by the pet name. It is not a serious proposal, and he soon abandons his wife to her neurasthenia and her wallpaper.

One of John's prescriptions for his wife is that she refrain from writing. Her diary, therefore, is written in secret. Judith Fetterley has argued that, while the narrator apparently challenges Weir Mitchell's method ("…personally, I disagree with their ideas" (Gilman, 1892: 31-2)), she needs always to be mindful that her diary may be read by John. She is careful, therefore, to include his text in her own: "John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad". "Because she is imprisoned in John's house and text", Fetterley argues, "and because his text has infected her mind, she experiences anxiety, contradiction, and ambivalence in the act of writing" (Fetterley 1986: 162). The urge to write therefore becomes a reluctance to write ("I don't know why I should write this. I don't want to. I don't feel able" (Gilman 1892: 38)), and is replaced by the drive to interpret the pattern

on the wallpaper – to read the writing on the wall. Fetterley's reading suggests that the pattern represents the male text that imprisons the narrator – the convoluted, patriarchal medical discourse which her husband, brother and Weir Mitchell have employed to justify her incarceration. John has forbidden independent reading (always in control of text, he reads to her), so she is obliged instead to read the wallpaper. The pattern is extraordinarily impenetrable, and yet also "pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study" (Gilman 1892: 33). "I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion", she insists (37). It is a skill to be "mastered"; a challenge (40). This is not just nervous excitement. The fact is she is *good at* reading wallpaper. Like Gilman herself, who studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, she "know[s] a little of the principles of design" (37). Indeed she has derived "entertainment and terror" from scrutinising walls since childhood (35). She recognises that this pattern, with its decadent "debased Romanesque" and "florid arabesque" "commits every artistic sin" (37, 41, 33). She sees imperfections in the papering itself, and knows what laws to look for in her search for meaning: "laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of…" (37). When she was *writing* on the paper it appeared to be "dead"; now she is *reading* it, it "undulates", and becomes animated (31, 39). She even displays the jealousy of the academic expert: "I know [Jennie] was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!" (42). This is literary research, and what it leads to is a subtext. There is a layer between the surface of the wallpaper and its sticky side. The design partially obscures a second pattern that "skulks behind that silly and conspicuous front design", and this background design begins to absorb her attention (36). As "the dim shapes get clearer every day", it becomes easier to read through the dominant text of male medical and marital direction (39). She sees the muted text beneath, and recognises that it moves independently. Once she has distinguished the figure of a trapped woman, it becomes her mission to release her.

Fetterley is not the only critic to see Gilman's wallpaper as a palimpsest. In "The Writing of 'The Yellow Wallpaper': A Double Palimpsest" Catherine Golden, too, argues that the "dim shapes" beneath the surface pattern constitute an erased text which emerges as Gilman's story – a story to challenge the "text" of the narrator's madness (Golden 1989: 155-65). I suggest, though, that it is equally possible to see the wallpaper as an autostereogram – a visual illusion in which a "repressed" three-dimensional scene emerges (if one overcomes the brain's natural inclination to focus,

and looks at it cross- or wall-eyed) from a two-dimensional abstract design. The narrator's feverish, apparently fruitless reading of the wallpaper may appear to her relatives to be a symptom of her insanity, but actually she has discovered a new kind of reading – a deconstructive *reading between*. She has perceived a loosening of the surface/structure dichotomy; and in the liminal space between pattern and wall she now begins the attempt to write an alternative text, in which room and world lose their rigid demarcation. As Michael Levenson points out in "From the Closed Room to the Opening Sky", and as we shall see in Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" later in this chapter, the confinement of the modernist subject is not simply a burial. It is a "productive circumscription" (Levenson 2007: 4).

If the narrator is deconstructing the wall, though, she is doing so cautiously. The ambiguity of the relationship between woman and wall is crucial to our understanding of the "The Yellow Wallpaper". In an essay on the photography of Francesca Woodman, Abigail Solomon-Godeau draws a parallel between Gilman's story and Francesca Woodman's series of photographs entitled *House* (1975-77). What the photographs show, says Godeau, is a woman devoured by a house. "Swallowed by the fireplace, layered over by the wallpaper, effaced, occulted" and "identified with the scabrous walls and corners against which she is impressed", she is a "living sacrifice to the domus" (Solomon-Godeau 1991: 439-40). Chris Townsend has subsequently challenged this view, making the excellent point that the photograph fixes time in such a way that it is impossible to establish whether the woman is being consumed by the house, or ejected from it (Townsend 2006: 20).There is no particular reason, indeed, to deprive the woman of agency. She could be *emerging* from the wall, or retreating into it. The comparison Godeau draws between Woodman's photograph and Gilman's story is an excellent one, but Townsend's reservations should be taken into account. Walls' intentions, in both works, are difficult to ascertain; and the decision as to whether they should be embraced or escaped is not an easy one to make. Gilman's narrator rescues her *doppelgänger*, eventually, by stripping large sections of the wallpaper, but the woman does not emerge to join her in the room. She escapes, instead, the other side of the wall, where the narrator watches her through the window: "away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a high wind", without showing the smallest desire to join her there (Gilman 1892: 44). The world is attractive, but also deeply threatening; and the narrator's impulse to escape is always counterbalanced by an agoraphobic attachment to the interior. At times she shows signs of identifying with

the liberated "new" woman ("I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!"), but only as an escapee from the wallpaper (46). She makes a very clear distinction between them when the woman is the other side of the wall. To be absolutely certain of their separation, indeed, she ties herself to the bed. At one point she admits she has contemplated jumping out of the window, but insists: "I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and may be misconstrued" (46). The other side of the wall is still a male space, from which she prefers to exclude herself: "I don't like to *look* out of the window even. You don't get *me* out on the road there". Her room has become her universe; she needs no other.

The room is also very much *her* space, which she now feels able to negotiate with John. When she locks him out she proves, as Catherine Golden points out in the introduction to her sourcebook on "The Yellow Wallpaper", that she has accomplished a Woolfian room of her own (Golden 2004: 3). Now in control of his access, when John calls for an axe she coolly tells him where she has thrown the key; and, as he enters the room, it is his turn to suffer a nervous collapse. The narrator, it seems, has liberated herself from Weir Mitchell's text, and appropriated it to turn the tables on her husband. Bluebeard overthrown, John now lies unconscious in her path amid the strips of wallpaper she has peeled from the walls. Gilman's poem "An Obstacle" (1895) concludes with a similarly prostrate husband. "Climbing up a mountain-path/ With many things to do", the poem's speaker finds her path blocked by a male "prejudice", a "colossal mule", an "awful incubus" that "quite cut off the view" (Gilman 1895: 41-2). This "obstacle" is blocking the path to the world, where the speaker has "important business of [her] own,/ And other people's too". Having tried everything from reasoned argument to physical violence, she finally solves the problem by walking "directly through him,/ As if he wasn't there!" To be fair to John in "The Yellow Wallpaper", he is not actually obstructing his wife' path to the public sphere. He is unconscious, after all, and the door is now unlocked. What he is blocking is her orbit around the room's perimeter. Empowered by the discovery that, as she creeps: "my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way", she has established her own "ten-fingered grasp" on architecture, and is reluctant to let it go (Gilman 1892: 47). Creeping over John at every circuit so that she may never lose contact with the wall, she remains anchored to the room's centre, her eyes scrupulously averted from the windows through which the other woman vigorously creeps.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic* Gilbert and Gubar compare the escape of the narrator's *doppelgänger* to "the progress of nineteenth-century literary women out of the texts defined by patriarchal poetics into the open spaces of their own authority" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979: 91). It seems a limited authority, given that the woman still creeps. Walter Benn Michaels has suggested that Gilman hobbles both women to denounce Weir Mitchells's practice of re-teaching his patients to crawl on all fours before permitting them to graduate to walking, and it is a convincing hypothesis (Michaels 1987: 4-6). I think Gilbert and Gubar are right, however, to claim her as a feminist literary success story. While the *doppelgänger*'s infantile gait confirms that she has not entirely escaped Weir Mitchell's system, she is undeniably out in the public realm; and, while the narrator occupies the room she has reclaimed from her husband, this alternative self sets about fulfilling an alternative destiny – to author "The Yellow Wallpaper", and release it to the world.

Henri Barbusse's *Hell* (1908)

Left alone by the proprietress of the Parisian boarding house in which he plans to live for an indefinite period, the narrator of Henri Barbusse's *Hell* stands in front of the mirror, and takes stock. "I look at the room", he says: "and I look at myself" (Barbusse 1908: 1). On the floor of the former there is an oriental carpet made threadbare by the "crowd of people [who] have trodden it day after day". On its walls the ornamental mouldings are worn and loose, and the wallpaper is blackened by "a whole hoard of human beings [who] have passed this way like smoke" (2). The reflected narrator, on the other hand, is comparatively untainted by others. A long-orphaned, unmarried, childless man of almost thirty, he prides himself that he has "nobody to mourn" and "no complicated desires", and yet admits to a brain that is "empty", and to an existence that is but a "positive nothingness" (2, 6, 3). There is a void in the room too – an "emptiness between these four walls" that is not dispelled by the evidence of occupation its stained surfaces display (1). A room "where everybody comes, and which everybody leaves", after all, only amplifies each occupant's solitude (6-7). This is the sense of isolation that Colin Wilson describes in his seminal study of twentieth-century literary alienation, *The Outsider* (1956) – a work that opens with an analysis of *Hell*. In his introduction to the Picador edition, "*The Outsider,* Twenty Years On" (1978), Wilson draws a comparison between himself as a young writer and many of his favourite characters from fiction (Wilson 1956: 1). They include Fyodor Dostoyevsky's Rodion

Romanovich Raskolnikov, Knut Hamsun's Andreas Tangen, and Rainer Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge. The boarding-house existence of the latter is, indeed, strikingly similar to that of *Hell*'s narrator. "Here I sit in my little room", says Brigge: "I, Brigge, who have grown to be twenty-eight years old and of whom no one knows. I sit here and am nothing. And nevertheless this nothing begins to think and thinks, five flights up, on a grey Parisian afternoon, these thoughts" (Rilke 1910: 28). Brigge's thoughts, though, are not confined to his room. Initially he boasts of his lack of interest in the medical student who occupies the room next to his. When his neighbour is taken ill and leaves for the country, however, he finds himself susceptible to sudden impulses to enter his room. "It would interest me", he says, "to know what that room is really like. It is easy to form an idea of any particular room, and often the idea just about corresponds to the reality. Only the room one has next door to one is always entirely different from what one imagines it" (157). A fascination with the next room, it transpires, is also a feature of the experience of *Hell*'s narrator. Sitting at the table on the day of his arrival, he is surprised to hear unmuffled singing in the room next to his. The clarity of the voice, and the evidence it provides of a life lived more vibrantly than his own, moves him powerfully. Closer inspection of the wall reveals a hand-sized hole near the ceiling, an opening disguised by the ornamental mouldings, but which he can easily reach if he stands on the bed. Through the breach the next room "stretches out", "offer[ing] itself", voluptuously, to his gaze (Barbusse 1908: 9).

Michael Levenson's proposition that "a self, a soul, a pronoun within the receptacle of the room" is a favourite modernist trope is an astute one, but I believe it could be taken further – extended to include *another* self, within the receptacle of the *next* room (Levenson 2007: 4). Marvelling at the "supreme mystery" that "here [is] one room; there another", Virginia Woolf's Clarissa Dalloway watches the old woman in the house opposite hers as she moves around her bedroom, and delights in the "privacy of the soul" that results from her "being quite unconscious that she [is] being watched" (Woolf 1925: 139-40). Rilke's Brigge, we suspect, is prompted by a similar voyeuristic delight. It is the neighbour that interests him, quite as much as the room he inhabits – his otherness, the privacy of his soul. By holing the wall between his room and the room next door, Barbusse is giving his narrator unique access to this otherness. His delight in the next room springs partly from the fact that it "isn't mine", and partly from the possibility that it is "so much better than mine" (Barbusse 1908: 9). Identical as the two rooms appear, it seems to him that "mine has finished and the other is going to begin…"

(18). Unlike Rilke's narrator, he does not have to speculate about the next room. It lies spread before him, "completely naked", and full of potential (9). If it is possible to see through a wall into another room, he supposes it may also be possible to see through other surfaces and structures – faces, clothes, politics, philosophy, religion – into the core of another human being; to overcome the divide ("the greatest breach in nature", as William James characterised it in *The Principles of Psychology* in 1890) between self and other (James 1890: 235).

The relationship between the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the wall of her attic is an exceptionally close one: she touches it, smells it, and presses against it as she creeps around the room's perimeter. But even she does not achieve the intense intimacy of the bond between *Hell*'s narrator and his wall. To improve his view he "cling[s]" to it with "arms outstretched", "flatten[s]" himself against it, and even "crucifie[s]" himself on it (Barbusse 1908: 17, 16, 57). With forehead, chest and palms pressed against it he strives simultaneously to "break it down and go through it" and to merge with it, "embrac[ing] it with [his] whole body" until it "seem[s] to echo the sound of [his] heartbeats" (25, 57). The explanation for this abandoned spread-eagling is that he has "no doubt somebody is going to come" (17). It seems to him that the walls are "waiting with the whole of their weight" for an occupant who quite reasonably assumes they will be unpunctured, and who will, he hopes, behave accordingly (85). The hole in the wall has made a theatre of the next room. The first person to make an entrance, as it transpires, is the maid. The narrator has seen her before, in the hotel corridors, and has been repelled by her "black hands" and "dusty tasks" (10). But now, he says, "I am looking at her", and "of her, there is nothing left but herself" (11). In the next room, like Mrs Dalloway's neighbour, "she is in that innocence, that perfect purity: solitude". He is seeing her inner being, which has been separated from her outer experience by the closed door.

The corridor, where the maid has left her public role, is a horrific, claustrophobic space, which the narrator has to endure on his reluctant trek to the dining room downstairs:

> As I pass along the corridor, a door shuts quickly, cutting off the laugh of a woman taken by surprise. People run away, put up their defences. A meaningless noise oozes from the shadowy walls, worse than silence. Under the doors there crawls, crushed and killed, a ray of light, worse than darkness (19).

And if, in the corridor, sound and light are deadened and diminished by walls and doors, in the dining room the narrator finds an excess of light. His attention is both attracted and repelled by the "general sparkling" he finds there, by the ubiquitous smiles, "gleaming foreheads", "shining eyes, ties, bodices" and "brilliantly white table" – all the reflective and deflective surfaces which serve to isolate him from the diners and the "alms of their thoughts" (13, 18). Assembled, and dissembling, these are the "surface-level expressions" of the bourgeois occupants of Siegfried Kracauer's hotel lobby, and reveal the aimlessness and estrangement of the modern condition (Kracauer 1925: 75). Kracauer's residents are "empty forms", who "file by as ungraspable as flat ghosts". "If they possessed an interior, indeed: "it would have no windows at all" (183). The outward forms of Barbusse's diners are similarly visible, and their inner beings just as ungraspable. When the narrator tries to gain access to their thoughts, to see "what they are" – to see their essence – he "come[s] up […] against their foreheads, as if against cornerstones" (Barbusse 1908: 13). In a public room, a forehead is as forbidding as any wall. Occasionally, "attracted by [his] fellow men", he ventures out onto the street. He is soon repelled, though, by the "steep, shuttered houses" and the equally self-protective passers-by (63). "Everywhere", he says, "I saw walls and faces" – façades behind which people hide. Concluding that he is "wasting [his] time here in everybody's space", he turns back towards his boarding house (68). He notices, on these forays into the outside world, that all around him "the passers-by return to the houses of which they have been thinking" – that others are drawn, like him, towards internal space (20). When they are outside, they are restrained by "all the forces of society"; but in their rooms' "compact solitude" they can relax their faces, discard their clothes and inhibitions, and disclose their secrets (30, 70). *Hell*'s narrator, like Mrs Dalloway as she looks through the window next door, celebrates the opportunity the closed room offers to inhabit without inhibition: purely, in the knowledge that one is unwatched. It is not that he does not recognise the human need for contact; this is the need that draws him down to the hotel dining room and out into the street. What he finds there, though, is that walls and faces deny him access to his fellow men, and serve only to remind him of his isolation.

The narrator's estrangement is shared by other modernist protagonists. In *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, spiders' threads of connection between characters snap as they forget each other, leaving behind a trail of abandoned consciousnesses (Woolf 1925: 123), and in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* the knowledge that the grieving Ursula Brangwen recognises as lying at "the terrible core of her suffering" is that she is "always

herself" (Lawrence 1915: 319). When *Hell*'s narrator watches carnal acts through his holed wall he is seeking evidence that the tragic gap between self and other can be bridged. There are "so many sorts of separation" which, he hopes, can be overcome by two people alone in a room (Barbusse 1908: 19). That Wilson opens *The Outsider* with him is, perhaps, testament to his disappointment. In the room next door he witnesses two women who "love each other and possess each other as far as that is possible on this earth", but who are nevertheless helplessly preoccupied with their own bodies (73). Their "marble brows collide" despite their close embrace, separating them as effectively as the diners downstairs are separated by their gleaming foreheads; and, although they speak of their "entwined souls", what the narrator sees in the shadows of the room is two distinct figures "crawling up and down each other under the sheets like grubs" (75). He also witnesses the coupling of a poet and his mistress, who prove to be as "defeated by isolation" as the two women (89). The narrator cannot but conclude, as he watches them, that sexual ecstasy "only accentuate[s] their twin solitudes", and that orgasm is "not union, but two deliriums superimposed one upon another" (110). Another pair of lovers forms a "monstrous, multiple creature" that separates into two disconnected beings who, "turning their necks […] avert their gaze at the moment they make their fullest use of each other" (223); and as for the birth he witnesses, it is another scene of despairing separation – a "breaking away" of a new human being from its mother: "a piece of flesh taken from her flesh – her heart […] torn out of her" (162). In *Hell* men and women are eternally divided by flesh as "dead and icy" as the wall that separates its boarding-house rooms (68). It is impossible to escape what Ursula Brangwen designates the "cold otherness of being" (Lawrence 1915: 410).

The opening in *Hell*'s narrator's bedroom wall has proved architecture's penetrability, and he hopes human flesh will be similarly vulnerable. But although the next room "opens up like a human being" to reveal "bluish, reddish pieces of furniture […] in the guise of vague organs, dimly alive", these figurative viscera fail to satisfy his appetite for the internal (Barbusse 1908: 68-9). He believes it is the literal body that holds the human essence prisoner, and there is an array of barriers keeping him from it. The "forces of society" that conspire to deny him access include clothes, as well as walls and faces, and on the Parisian street he looks for opportunities to defy them. Seeing a girl sitting on the upper deck of a tram, he speculates that "from underneath, it must have been possible to see right inside her", and observes hopefully that "the street was full of dresses, swaying, offering themselves, so light that they nearly took

flight at the edges; dresses which looked as if they were going to fly up but didn't" (65-6). While clothes prove so frustratingly stable on the street, however, in the next room his fantasy promises to become reality. The second woman to enter it, believing herself alone, lies on the divan and lifts her skirt above her knees. Beside himself, the narrator watches for a glimpse of her "extraordinary depths", maintaining that "in spite of laws and dresses, the male gaze always thrusts and crawls towards a woman's sex like a reptile towards its hole" (24, 26). As her embroidered drawers "gape open in a wide, dark slit, full of shadow" his gaze "leaps into it" in search of "the centre of her", and this intense desire for gashes and cracks, for the "agape" and the "utterly open", is not limited to the vagina (24-5). The mouth, too, is an irresistible "open wound", which leaks secrets and subverts the dissembling face (76). Vaginas and mouths suggest a body surface as vulnerable to puncture as the narrator's bedroom wall: they are weak points, which promise access to the human core.

There is no phallic imagery in *Hell* to complement the profusion of openings. It is only the narrator's gaze that thrusts and leaps, and as often as not his eyes, "like two pale mouths", themselves function not as penetrators, but as openings (27). "Like a vampire", he says, "I drank in [the] sight" of the lovers next door (36). Such visual guzzling arises from a "terrible, frantic love of truth", a thirst that his voyeuristic vantage point puts him in a good position to slake (41). To acquire an enhanced knowledge of human life, he claims, one must transcend it:

> You have to be placed like myself above mankind, you have to be at once among human beings and separated from them […] For when you are in the midst of life, you don't see these things, you don't know anything of them; you pass blindly from one extreme to the other (61).

The question he asks now is whether, as a "spectator divorced from mankind and looking at them from above", he shares God's vantage point (91). And, if so, *is he God*? The poet's mistress, after all, is a "woman whose heart I can see, and whose destiny I know as well as God could know it", and the lesbian lovers' repeated "'God can see us!'" combines with the priest's authoritative assertion to the dying man – "'We are alone, you and I, with God'" – to reinforce the impression of a fusion between voyeur and God (84, 72, 180). But the narrator's initial satisfaction in his divine position wanes as he becomes increasingly aware of its irrelevance. Exchanges of gaze that seem to take place between himself and the occupants of the next room are illusory, and when the poet's mistress suddenly asks "'are you happy?'", the impression that she is

addressing the narrator, rather than the poet, is fleeting (58). In fact, as the narrator eventually sees, neither lover is happy, and the poet's "Where is God, then, where is God?" is a cry of impotent distress. A spent love is spent whether or not it is observed, and regardless of who observes it. Later, when he witnesses the death of an old man, the narrator tries to assert his own existence. Speaking aloud for the first time in the novel, he calls through the hole in the wall: "'I can see you!'" (195). But his voice, which "enter[s] the room" at the moment of death, remains unacknowledged because it is unperceived. Neither he nor God exists for the dying man.

There is another opening in the wall of the next room, aside from the narrator's peephole. The window in the opposite wall is "the only thing which is white" in a room blackened by passing humanity (2). It shines, "pale, huge, dispelling everything around it", and the room's occupants are "drawn to it by the vast space beyond" (59, 160). If it frames the Parisian street outside, they pay it no attention. The "apparition" that attracts them is of an "immaculate blue", and radiates a "light unstained by blood" which relieves the "sickening carnal tension" in the room (59-60). In the poet's mistress it elicits "the most immense of all longings, the most immense of human desires" – a pining for Heaven (102). The window, however, is "as vague as a milky way" – a distant chimera (76). Two doubting doctors, who come to the next room to discuss the prognosis of the dying man, resoundingly decide against the existence of God or Heaven. One turns to face the "whitening window", and "to shake his fist at the sky, on account of the realities of life" (153). By the end of the novel the narrator's own belief in God, always "vague", has entirely evaporated, but he remains sympathetic to humanity's yen for Heaven (3). He listens with interest to the doctors' expansive conversation, which includes a debate on the teleology of the foetus and the tumour. The foetus, they agree, reaches a conclusion. It forms "limiting membranes", and is born when complete (137). The tumour, on the other hand, "isn't completed; it goes on, without ever reaching its limits". With no acknowledgement of bone structure it spreads, because "spreading is all it can do". So cancer, they conclude with delight, is "infinity in the strict sense of the word" (138). The narrator, sharing their scepticism, is convinced that the inclination of "prisoners of rooms" to "drag themselves towards the void of the window" is as vain as their pursuit of "a perfect union between two hearts" (253). The delusion is, however, considerably more appealing than the doctors' admiration for the transcendent tumour. If Hell is the interior, of both room and body, a belief in Heaven is condonable in those who believe themselves trapped there.

Sitting alone in his room following the death of the man next door, the narrator raises his eyes to his own window. Through it he sees: "the stars […] pushing the sky away above me, the city plung[ing] down at my feet, the horizon flee[ing] eternally from me on every side [as] the shadows and the lights form an infinite sphere" (199). Having dismissed Heaven as an illusion, he now hypothesises that this expanding universe may nevertheless exist objectively, "outside me, independently of me, on so huge a scale that it reduces me to nothingness as if I were dead already. And if I am indeed non-existent, or if I shut my eyes, it makes no difference; the universe will still exist" (213). He remembers the claim of the dying man that, after his death, "every object in the world will peacefully remain in its accustomed place"; and looks forward, extravagantly, to the decomposition of his own corpse – to the total absorption of self into universe as "little by little the inside of the body becomes the outside" (216, 203). He is cheered, too, when he thinks of the sheer number of similar decompositions – the "four thousand five hundred milliard skulls" which, he calculates, have been "crumbling to dust since the human race began" (203). If his own skull is not just perishable, but indistinguishable from the skulls of the rest of the human race, there may after all be nothing to prevent him living as others live. He walks the streets in a trance-like state, fantasising about "a door standing ajar, an open window, other windows glowing softly with an orange light", and addresses an imaginary woman with whom he may live: "I shall come home and open the door in the darkness. I shall hear you coming from the next room; bringing a lamp; a dawning light will herald your approach" (227, 229). It is a figment, though, this open door between adjoining rooms. When a woman actually brushes past him on the street and goes into a house, "she disappear[s]; she die[s]" as the door shuts behind her, the thread that connects her consciousness with his snapping as decisively as those that connect the characters in *Mrs Dalloway* (229).

There are two climactic moments in *Hell* when the narrator, ordinarily an eavesdropper on the thoughts of others, vocalises his own. The first is his desperate, impotent call through the wall to the dying man: "'I can see you!'" The second is a cry, "lucid, conscious and unforgettable", that rises within him "like a sublime chord": the single word "'No!'" (213). Attractive though he has found it, ultimately he rejects his vision of skeletal disintegration, of a rapturous diffusion of self into a universe which exists infinite and eternal, in favour of the "clear statement which sets within each one of us the principle of existence", the Cartesian *cogito* (214). "I think, therefore I am",

he says, is a truth which he has himself read in the "difference and solitude of each face" through his peephole, and the external universe seen through his window is as much a "mirage and a hallucination" as the paradise seen by the lovers through the window next door. "'We are what passes'", the poet's mistress said, in an earlier dialogue with her lover (104). The poet corrected her: "'We are what sees things pass. We are what remains'". It is the poet with whom the narrator ultimately agrees. Sitting on his chair "as if [he] were falling", steadying himself against the wheeling universe outside, he holds on to the "milestone" where his "sacred anxiety comes to a halt" – his final solipsistic avowal that he is the "centre of the world", and that the external universe cannot exist without him (199, 202).

Hell's narrator is a frustrated writer. His early attempts to "reproduce the exact reality of things" result in nothing but an unintelligible "lattice-work of words"– a series of "dead signs", "childish daubs" and "futile noises" reminiscent of Gilman's wallpaper pattern (31-2). By the end of the novel though, having witnessed birth and death through the hole in his wall, as well as adulterous, incestuous and lesbian love, he feels better placed to reproduce reality. He is discouraged, though, by his final trip out onto the Parisian street. In a restaurant he overhears a conversation between a popular writer and his companion. The subject of his forthcoming novel, says the popular writer, is "'a man [who] pierces a hole in the wall of a hotel room and watches what happens in the next room'" (235). He congratulates himself that, in showing "'man stripped of his externals'", his novel will demonstrate that while "'others stand for imagination, I stand for truth'", and proceeds to describe a series of scenes which are "unexpected, brilliant and astonishing" – and comic. When his companion suggests that the book may have philosophical implications, the popular writer airily answers: "'Possibly. In any case, I wasn't looking for them. I'm a writer, thank heavens, not a thinker'" (236). Horrified, the narrator stumbles out of the restaurant and into a theatre, where he overhears a member of the audience comment on the play's unremarkability. "'So much the better'", replies her companion: "'I go to the theatre to relax'" (244). Truth, for the narrator, is a "profound thing" which has been travestied by the popular writer, and which should not be wasted on a human race too foolish to appreciate it (237). Returning to his boarding house, he determines to remember "the tragedy of this room", but not to speak of it (255). Increasingly, as he tries to look into the next room, he finds himself "repulsed by the wall" (252). Through it he can still hear voices, but they are muffled and, "like all those who are shut up in a room", he can make nothing of them

(253). His eyes, like his mouth and ears, begin to "close up like a healing wound" (255). With relief, he finds himself reconciled to the estrangement between the modern self and other, and retreats inward from sealed room to sealed skull.

Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" (1917)

The narrator of Virginia Woolf's "The Mark on the Wall" is quite as fascinated by her living-room wall as the narrators of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Hell* are by the walls of their bedrooms. Unlike them, though, she feels under no obligation to take a closer look. Barbusse's narrator eagerly flattens himself against his wall when he finds its peephole, despite considerable physical discomfort, and the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" gets out of her sick bed to touch, strip and rub against hers. When Woolf's narrator notices a mark on her wall, however, she stays firmly where she is. It is not lack of interest that keeps her at a distance. It is just, she says, that she wants to think about it "quietly, calmly, spaciously", without rising from her chair (Woolf 1917: 85). There are several moments when she gives serious consideration to the possibility of standing up. She decides against it, though, firstly on the grounds that "inaccuracy of thought" makes it unlikely that she will secure the knowledge she anticipates, and secondly on the grounds that anyway knowledge acquired in this way has no value (84). Getting out of her chair would be a "mere waste of energy", she insists, when she "can think sitting still as well as standing up" (87-8). It is an impressionist's passivity. The "mystery and beauty" of perception, as Alice Meynell wrote in an essay entitled "Rain" in 1914, is "surely not that we see by flashes, but that nature flashes on our meditative eyes" (Meynell 1914: 13). There is, therefore, "no need for the impressionist to make haste, nor would haste avail him". By staying in her chair "The Mark on the Wall"'s narrator boosts her receptivity to impression, and gives her thoughts free rein.

For Woolf this quiet thinking in a chair, this ruminating in a room, is never an unproductive occupation. After all, as she writes in *A Room of One's Own* (1928):

> Women have sat indoors all these millions of years, so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force, which has, indeed, so overcharged the capacity of bricks and mortar that it must needs harness itself to pens and brushes and business and politics (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 1928: 87).

Domestic walls, according to Woolf, have always inspired women first to think, then to write. The biographer of the eponymous hero(ine) of *Orlando* (1928) is infuriated

when his subject, now a woman, takes to "this mere wool-gathering; this thinking; this sitting in a chair day in, day out, with a cigarette and a sheet of paper and a pen and an inkpot" (Woolf, *Orlando* 1928: 255). From her chair she will "neither love, nor kill" but will, rather, "only think and imagine". She will also, Woolf's irony suggests, usurp him as a writer. The attic room in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is another potentially inspirational space. When books, pens and paper are banned, its narrator redirects her creative energy to the walls. Reading wallpaper, she finds, provides some relief from "the press of ideas", and can be "as good as gymnastics" for exercising the mind (Gilman 1892: 35, 37). It has its drawbacks, of course: the "sprawling", "flamboyant" pattern is too diffuse to promote mental health (37, 33). Its ill-disciplined curves, which "plunge off at outrageous angles" and "destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions", provoke untidy, neurotic thought (33). It was in response to such decorative excess – "the medley of […] damasks and patterned wallpapers" left behind by the nineteenth century – that Le Corbusier promoted the white wall as the modernist aesthetic paradigm (Le Corbusier 1925: 190). His manifesto for twentieth-century decoration includes a "Law of Ripolin" to enforce whitewashing. The advantage of a white wall, he claims, is that it achieves an "elimination of the equivocal", which provokes a "concentration of intention on its proper object" (192). The problem with Gilman's wallpaper pattern is its rambling "everlastingness" (Gilman 1892: 35). Unfocused and misleading, its pattern clogs the mind. Woolf's mark, on the other hand, "black upon the white wall", is condensed and concise (Woolf 1917: 83). The narrator's thoughts "swarm" upon it in an ecstasy of speculation, "as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly", but the mark also allows her to "leave it", as ants do, and roam elsewhere. If, as Judith Fetterley suggests, the pattern on Gilman's yellow wallpaper is male text, the thoughts provoked by Woolf's mark on the wall are the "feminine prose" that Dorothy Richardson advocates in the foreword to her *Pilgrimage* series of novels (1915-1967), which "should properly be unpunctuated, moving from point to point without formal obstruction" (Richardson 1938: 12). The mark enables the narrator "to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle" – to think without obstruction (Woolf 1917: 85). It does, however, provide punctuation when appropriate. After all, as the narrator says: "there's no harm in putting a full stop to one's disagreeable thoughts by looking at a mark on the wall" (88). Gilman's wallpaper pattern is feminine prose run riot; it is no wonder her narrator ties herself to the bed. Woolf's narrator, though, has only to fix her eyes on her mark to feel mentally

grounded – as though she has "grasped a plank in the sea". It allows her to draw breath before she is again swept away by the current of her thoughts.

The punctuation imposed by the interrupter at the end of the story, however, is not so welcome. The narrator is suddenly conscious that "something is getting in the way" of her luxurious, meandering thoughts (89). Like the "awful incubus" who "quite cuts off the view" of the speaker in Gilman's "An Obstacle" (Gilman 1895: 41-2), this intruder causes "a vast upheaval of matter" as he looms over Woolf's narrator, announces his intention of going out to buy a newspaper, curses the war, then identifies the mark on the wall as an aestivating snail (Woolf 1917: 89). Trespassing upon her private relationship with the mark, he causes exactly the "collision with reality" she has been trying to avoid (88). An importunate full stop, externally imposed, the interruption cuts through her train of thought like a guillotine. This interrupter, as Laura Marcus points out in her analysis of "The Mark on the Wall" in *Virginia Woolf* (1997), is the last in a series of male "censors", including cabinet ministers, antiquaries and bishops, who have appeared throughout the story (Marcus 1997: 45). Like the narrator's husband in "The Yellow Wallpaper", who "scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (Gilman 1892: 31), these intellectual spoilsports champion "hard, separate facts" – "standard" knowledge carefully acquired by "accumulating evidence on both sides of the question" (Woolf 1917: 86-7). They promote hierarchical thought, using Whitaker's *Table of Precedency* to make absolutely sure "everybody is followed by somebody" (88). The more "spacious", free-associative thinking favoured by the narrator is, to them, anathema.

The "masculine point of view" also favours a history dominated by external events (86). The interrupter's utterance closes the story, and locates it squarely in the First World War. While the narrator is just as keen to "fix a date" at its beginning, she does so by remembering only "what one saw": the page of her book, the chrysanthemums on the mantelpiece, her cup of tea, her cigarette, and the fire in the grate (83). It is not that she has no sense of history. Her speculations about the origin of the mark on the wall induce musings on Chinese, Tudor and Roman artefacts; botany at the time of the Stuarts; Troy, and ancient burial sites. She feels, however, a "contempt for men of action – men, we assume, who don't think" which matches Orlando's biographer's scorn for wool-gathering women (88). The public sphere holds newspapers, war and (in the case of "The Yellow Wallpaper") Weir Mitchell; but to *think* one needs to be static, and inside. In aligning feminine thought with the interior,

it must be said, Woolf is far from suggesting it is sluggish, conservative, or anachronistic. As Rosner argues in *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life*, what Woolf achieves in her writing is a rapprochement between modernism and the domestic. Merging the apparently "antithetical categories", she "locates modernism's origins squarely in the spaces of private life" (Rosner 2005: 4). The room-inspired thoughts of the "The Mark on the Wall"'s narrator, certainly, are favourably disposed to the modern. Her conjectures on the previous tenants, who decorated the room with forged pictures and moved on, are not as disapproving as one might expect. They were, on the contrary, "very interesting people", who frequently return to her thoughts (Woolf 1917: 83). Whitaker would, no doubt, object to their desire to "leave this house because they wanted to change their style of furniture" but, for the narrator, it lends them a certain charm. These people intrigue her, and compensate for the antiquarian archaeologists who plod through her thoughts, weighed down by "clods of earth and stone", bones and historical pamphlets (87). Her hypotheses on the whereabouts of mislaid possessions – book-binding tools, bird cages, skates, coal scuttles and jewels – are hardly sorrowful, and she shows a modernist's delight in the stripped, the high-speed, the unstable and the accidental:

> The wonder is that I have any clothes on my back, that I sit surrounded by solid furniture at this moment. Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour – landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair! Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked! Tumbling head over heels in the asphodel meadows like brown paper parcels pitched down a shoot in the post office! With one's hair flying back like the tail of a racehorse! (84)

If her domesticity assures her a place in the Asphodel Meadows, she looks forward to arriving there unencumbered.

There is a shift here, I think: a change of emphasis which should encourage us to re-evaluate the interruption at the end of the story. The reference to the Asphodel Meadows suggests that Woolf does not entirely endorse her narrator's preference for remaining alone in her room, wallowing in a subjective epistemology while insulated from the visible world of action. I suggest that these are the post-Homeric Asphodel Meadows: a realm of utter neutrality, where languish the departed souls of those who have lived inactive lives – including those who sit in chairs looking at walls. The narrator's room is, like that of the narrators of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Hell*, a "box for a brain", but Woolf's narrator is not encouraged to shut herself in it and deny

the existence of objective reality. She is, on the contrary, reassured by reality. When she wakes from some "midnight dream of horror" it is to her furniture that she turns (88). To anchor herself she quietly contemplates her chest of drawers. "Worshipping solidity, worshipping reality" – a reality which turns Whitaker's archbishops and Lord High Chancellor "to the shadows of shades" – she finds this chest a comforting reminder of "the impersonal world which is proof of some existence other than ours". From it her thoughts travel to the wood of which it is composed, and from there to the tree which has, in fact, been tapping on her window from the outset of the tale:

> I like to think of the tree itself: first the close dry sensation of being wood […] then the slow delicious ooze of sap. I like to think of it, too, on winter's nights standing in the empty field with all its leaves close-furled, nothing tender exposed to the iron bullets of the moon, a naked mast upon an earth that goes tumbling, tumbling all night long (88-9)

Woolf's earth tumbles in an infinite universe reminiscent of the "boundless world" that "rises up" against Barbusse's narrator. Like Barbusse's it is a secular earth ("Gods and Devils, Hell and so forth" having been "laughed into the dustbin" along with Whitaker and Landseer reproductions (86)), but on it the tree grows "without paying any attention to us" (88). Unlike Bishop Berkeley's "tree in a park", this tree has an inner reality – an oozing sap and a woody being – which is not reliant on the perception of God or man (Berkeley 1710: 75). And when it falls it continues to exist. Its wood, used for "lining rooms where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes", provides an interface between internal and external reality (Woolf 1917: 89). It is this tree, and the furniture it engenders, that convinces the narrator to refuse the solipsism embraced by Barbusse's narrator, and accept the separate existence of a universe outside her skull and room.

To acknowledge the existence of the external world is one thing, for the twentieth-century artist, but to accept the pre-eminence of external events is often quite another. "To the twentieth century events are not important, Stein insists in "How Writing is Written" (1935):

> You must know that. Events are not exciting. Events have lost their interest for people. You read them more like a soothing syrup, and if you listen over the radio you don't get very excited […] People are interested in existence. Newspapers excite people very little […] For our purposes, for our contemporary purposes, events have no importance (Stein 1935: 157-8).

Modern fiction, as far as Stein is concerned, should not expect to look to history for its subject matter. It is what Milan Kundera argues, too, when he claims in *The Art of the Novel* (1968) that "the novelist is neither historian nor prophet: he is an explorer of existence" (Kundera 1968: 44). If this is a writer's view, it seems a good strategy to frame existence in a room, and leave history at the door. I suggest, though, that in "The Mark on the Wall" Woolf is problematising the practice of separating "existence" from "events". Celebrating the invisible interior life at the expense of the visible world of action is all very well; but ultimately – brutal as it may seem – the snail must be named, and news of the war must come crashing through the closed door. The intrusion on the interior in "The Mark on the Wall" prefigures similar encroachments in *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). The twentieth century was an era shot through with "events", stunned by them, and the avant-garde artist was in no position to distance himself from political engagement. This issue – the ethics of the bolt hole – will re-emerge in Chapter 4 of this thesis. One cannot avoid being acted upon by the world, and perhaps should not avoid acting upon it. Modernism may begin in a room, but it does not necessarily follow, for the modernist author, that it should end there.

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915)

Until she is forced to acknowledge that the "masculine point of view" may have some validity, "The Mark on the Wall"'s narrator's conception of the external universe flows painlessly from a perfect interiority. Sitting always in her chair, and looking only directly ahead, her visual field is limited to the fireplace, the mantelpiece, and the wall with its enigmatic mark. At no point does she look out of the window, and at no point does she look down at herself. She has no name, and we know nothing of her appearance. Moored only by the mark, her thoughts blissfully adrift, she is a pure, disembodied consciousness, while her room has become (in Levenson's phrase) "a palace of subjectivity": a haven for the Cartesian mind (Levenson 2007: 10). Woolf's narrator is not the only modernist protagonist to use walls to lose them. In Dorothy Richardson's *Interim* (1919), for example, Miriam Henderson shuts the door on the street and her fellow-boarders, and stands in the centre of her room. "Staring at the sheeny gaslit brown-yellow varnish of the wall-paper above the mantelpiece", she attains a state of *jouissance*: "a happiness and realisation", a sensation of "being suspended, in nothing" (Richardson 1919: 322). It is not easy, though, to lose the physical self in the room, and other modernist protagonists are too agoraphobic to desire

it. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" attaches herself so closely to her wall that she is stained by its oozing colour, and permeated by its smell; and by the end of *Hell* its narrator's room has become a "coffin too big for me", and he accepts that his brain needs to be more snugly boxed (Barbusse 1908: 210). With relief he feels the bones of his skull, "the grim white monster which I am in essence", and retreats into it (202). In Rilke's *Notebooks* Malte Brigge's Parisian hotel room (so like *Hell*'s narrator's, as I pointed out above) seems promising, at first. "I am learning to see", he writes in his diary: "I don't know why it is, but everything penetrates more deeply into me and does not stop at the place where until now it always used to finish. I have an inner self of which I was ignorant" (Rilke 1910: 14). Unlike the narrator of "The Mark on the Wall", however, who welcomes her unboundedness and the resultant hyper-receptivity to impression, Brigge panics. Like *Hell*'s narrator, he traces the outline of his face to reassure himself that, while "outside is beyond calculation", within his skull there is "scarcely any room" (69). Surely "nothing very large can possibly abide in this narrowness", he thinks, and "even the stupendous must become an inward thing and must restrict itself to fit the surroundings". The prospect of a state where "you stand almost outside yourself and cannot get back again" is, for Brigge, almost as horrific as his concomitant nightmare that "like a beetle that has been trodden on you gush out of yourself, and your little bit of surface hardness and adaptability go for nothing". Brigge is not one of those who thrills at the prospect of solidity melting into air. On the contrary, he dreads any suggestion of an intermingling of inside and outside, and clings to the coherent subjectivity which, he hopes, his skull will continue to contain.

Gregor Samsa, like Brigge, insists on clear boundaries. The first thing he does, indeed, on the morning of his metamorphosis, is to reassure himself of his own corporeality. What he sees, when he looks down at himself on waking, is a "domelike brown belly", divided into "stiff arched segments" from which numerous thin legs wave helplessly (Kafka 1915: 89). He cannot see his back, but he can feel that it is "hard, as if it were armour-plated". Gregor, it seems, is inescapably embodied, and the chitinous insect shell in which he is encased is a constant reminder of the division between self and world. During the first phase of his metamorphosis he makes some effort to maintain his inter-subjectivity. He assumes, indeed, that his condition is temporary, and that it is only a matter of time before he resumes his place as head of the family which inhabits the rest of the house. During this phase, like Brigge and *Hell*'s narrator, he maintains a strong interest in what is going on in the rooms adjoining his. The footsteps,

silences and sobs he hears through his bedroom walls are food for intense speculation. At first he is reluctant to move "for fear of losing one word of the conversation" next door (96). Once he is accustomed to his multiple legs, however, every time he hears voices "he run[s] to the door of the room concerned and press[es] his whole body against it" (109). Like *Hell*'s narrator, flattened against his hotel wall, Gregor is a fanatical eavesdropper. Unlike him, though, he is motivated less by the voyeuristic desire to see into the consciousnesses of others than by anxiety that he may himself disappear from those consciousnesses – always a risk when one is locked in a room. So long as he can hear his mother and sister discussing his plight in the adjoining rooms, he is satisfied he exists in their thoughts. As the family begins to get over the disruption caused by his metamorphosis, however, he is increasingly worried by the "silence all around, although the flat was certainly not empty of occupants" (106). During one such conversational lapse, he hypothesises that "perhaps his parents were sitting at table with the chief clerk, whispering" or even that "they were all leaning against the door and listening" (99). This fantasy of eavesdropping reciprocated reassures him that, though out of sight, he is not out of mind – that, despite the locked doors, there is some connection between himself and his family. It is one of a series of fantasies concerning doors. He flatters himself that the loud crash he is likely to make if he falls out of bed "would probably cause anxiety, if not terror, behind all the doors", a hope which wavers when he later watches, through a crack in the door, the "quiet life our family has been leading" while he has been out earning its keep (94, 106). Gregor fantasises about opening the door to the living room for some time before he discovers it is actually possible for him to do so. He is, he says, "eager to find out what the others […] would say at the sight of him" (98). In *Kafka's Clothes* (1992), a study of Kafka and early twentieth-century German aestheticism, Mark Anderson observes that at several points in the narrative Gregor, "despite his grotesque form, […] shows no hesitation in offering himself for public viewing" (Anderson 1992: 138). Far from being a monstrous manifestation of self-loathing, Anderson argues, Gregor regards his metamorphosed body as an aesthetic form of some power – an unashamed, avant-garde artwork, which its owner repeatedly seeks to display to his *petit-bourgeois* family (123, 143). Gregor's satisfaction, when he finally opens the door between his bedroom and the living room next door, proves the validity of Anderson's argument. He is gratified by his family's recoil. It indicates he still has some impact on the world.

Gregor's desire for contact with the outside, however, does not extend beyond the domestic sphere. As with the neurasthenic narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper", there is always some doubt as to whether he is a miscreant, an invalid or a malingerer, and his incarceration often looks more like voluntary withdrawal. Like Gilman's narrator, who takes to locking her door so that she may creep in peace, it was Gregor himself who, the night before his metamorphosis, locked all three of his bedroom doors to protect himself from the burdensome responsibilities of the external world. While mother, father, sister and employer now clamorously hammer on these doors, insisting that he account for his failure to get up for work, Gregor contemplates, from his bed, his undemanding "regular human bedroom", which lies as usual, "quiet between the four familiar walls" (Kafka 1915: 89). More nesting than cast out, he shows no inclination to penetrate further than the living room next door, although his bedroom door and the front door are together left open several times. The window, meanwhile, is not an encouraging aperture. Unlike *Hell*'s window, shining with its (albeit delusory) promise of heaven, from his metamorphosis to his death Gregor's is dimmed by rain, fog and murk. The street lights "cast a pale sheen here and there on the ceiling and the upper surfaces of the furniture", but fail to penetrate down to the floor where he lies (105). As his mutation progresses, his vision deteriorates, and the street dims to a "desert waste where grey sky and grey land blend […] indistinguishably into each other" (112). A vague, muddy amalgam, the external world no longer demands his participation. Vladimir Nabokov's claim, that "neither Gregor nor his maker realised that when the room was being made by the maid, he could have flown out and escaped and joined the other happy dung beetles on rural paths", takes no account of Gregor's distress when the window is opened by either maid or sister (Nabokov 1966: 174). Like the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper", who "[doesn't] like to *look* out of the window", let alone jump out of it, he chooses to stay indoors (Gilman 1892: 46). His vulnerable head worries him, unprotected as it is by his exoskeleton. The "curtaining and confining of himself" by a sheet, ostensibly a measure to shield him from the sensitive eyes of his sister, also provides him with an extra layer of defence (Kafka 1915: 114). His room, once "quiet", "regular" and "familiar", now seems "lofty" and "empty", and, full of "an apprehension he could not account for", he scuttles under the sofa, "where he felt comfortable at once" (106-7). Increasingly agoraphobic, Gregor's impulse now is to retreat further inward.

Gregor's relationship with his room changes, however, as he begins to accept his animal state. Like all beetles, he needs somewhere to hide, and his sofa is his log. But beetles also like to emerge from logs, especially when left alone. After his sister provides a particularly satisfying meal of decayed vegetables and rancid cheese, his body swells so that he is "so cramped he c[an] hardly breathe", and when the door closes behind her it is with relief that he "c[omes] out from under the sofa and stretche[s] and puff[s] himself out" (108). His many legs lend him an agility that is enhanced by the stickiness he discovers on the soles of his feet, and to keep himself from brooding he "t[akes] refuge in movement and crawl[s] up and down the room" (106). Amusing as he finds this, though, the "few square yards of floor space" he has at his disposal seem increasingly limiting, and when he finds he can no longer tolerate "lying quietly at rest" on the floor, he begins to experiment with the room's other surfaces (114). Eventually, for no other reason than "mere recreation", he takes up "crawling crisscross over the walls and ceiling" (115). Languishing on her immovable bed, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" whiles away the time firstly by following her wallpaper pattern (an occupation which is, she claims, is "as good as gymnastics"); then by creeping "smoothly on the floor" (Gilman 1892: 37, 47). Presumably she would have envied Gregor, who, leaving the floor to an asthmatic mother and a father recently "grown rather fat and sluggish", nimbly climbs the walls and hangs upside down from the ceiling (Kafka 1915: 112). Here he enjoys "the almost blissful absorption induced by this suspension" (115). This is another of the moments, identified by Anderson, when Gregor exults in his own body as avant-garde artwork (Anderson 1992: 139). Like Miriam Henderson and the narrator of "The Mark on the Wall", he is experiencing the *jouissance* of a room, but his rapture is more physical than theirs. While they achieve a state of disembodiment, of "being suspended in nothing", he is securely suspended from the ceiling. Joyfully conscious of his newly acrobatic body, he remains physically attached to his room.

Gregor's gymnastics are facilitated by his sister who, to give him "as wide a field as possible to crawl in", decides to clear the room of furniture (Kafka 1915: 115). Grete's zealous decluttering springs principally from a possessive desire for an exclusive relationship with her brother. "In a room where Gregor lorded it alone over empty walls", after all, "no-one save herself was likely ever to set foot". In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the narrator's husband and sister-in-law are similarly gratified by their patient's blossoming relationship with her room, observing that she seems to be

"flourishing" now that she has "something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch" (Gilman 1892: 42). But the happier Gilman's narrator and Gregor are, the more dispensable their carers become. Even family members, it seems, begin to lose significance to those whose soul mates are their rooms. Gilman's narrator lies on her huge bed (the only piece of furniture which has not been removed), and finds the room so exquisitely "quiet and empty and clean" she begs her sister-in-law to leave her alone there (45), and Gregor feels similarly "oppressed", "distressed" and "disturb[ed]" by Grete's ministrations (Kafka 1915: 113). The husband in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is, in the end, nothing but an obstacle impeding the narrator's concentrated creeping, and the husband in "The Mark on the Wall" is another interrupter of a perfect communion between narrator and room. In *The Metamorphosis* it is Gregor's mother who provides the interruption. Having been recruited by Grete to help with the furniture removal, she suddenly raises an objection. "The sight of the naked walls", she announces, "made her own heart heavy, and why shouldn't Gregor have the same feeling, considering that he had been used to his furniture for so long and might feel forlorn without it?" (116). At this point Gregor, unlike Gilman's narrator, is easily deflected from his jubilant creeping. Influenced by his mother's doubts, he asks himself:

> Did he really want his warm room, so comfortably fitted with old family furniture, to be turned into a naked den in which he would certainly be able to crawl unhampered in all directions but at the price of shedding simultaneously all recollection of his human background?

If the room is stripped of its furniture, it will also be stripped of human memory. Gregor, now, is inclined to agree with his mother, who maintains that removing his furniture signals "that we have given up hope of his ever getting better", and that what he must get better *from* is being an insect. It seems to him that her voice has rescued him from "the brink of forgetfulness", from the "senseless crawling around and around" which his furniture serves to impede. In a chapter on *The Metamorphosis* in his biography of Kafka, Pietro Citati argues that Gregor's is not as complete as Ovid's various metamorphoses. He is always "a divided creature", "a halfway creature […] that oscillates between animal and man" – a hybrid which, Citati contends, represents the conflicting social and ascetic impulses of man and writer (Citati 1990: 64). Gregor's sister and mother are each champions of one of his states. While Grete's "unconfessed dream is that Gregor should become completely animal", her mother is unwilling to watch the bedroom become a "naked den" in which her progeny will be free to play

uninterrupted (66). Her hope, according to Citati, is that "the pieces of furniture, with their ballast of affection, will keep Gregor from leaving men's existence", and will anchor him to the human. When he allows himself to be swayed by his mother's opinion, Gregor is inevitably also rejecting his sister's invitation to join him in an exclusive, innocent insect/carer relationship.

It is not without regret that he makes this choice. When he attaches himself to the picture on his wall it is not, as David Eggenschwiler suggested in 1978, a "gesture of opposition" to the removal of his human past, but rather a gesture of farewell to his insect state (Eggenschwiler 1978: 77). The woman depicted is as completely encased in her furs as Gregor is in his shell. She is decidedly animal, which is why he likes her. He climbs the wall and, discharging secretions, covers her with his body. When his mother comes into the room and catches sight of this display of insectness, this "huge brown mass on the flowered wallpaper", her reaction, like that of John to his wife's room-creeping in "The Yellow Wallpaper", is to fall in a dead faint (Kafka 1915: 119). But while Gilman's narrator ignores her husband and continues to creep, Gregor, "harassed by self-reproach and worry", first crawls hysterically "over everything, walls, furniture and ceiling" then loses his resistance to gravity, and drops like a stone to the floor. There he is vulnerable to a further interrupter. His father approaches him with his feet lifted so "uncommonly high" that Gregor is overwhelmed by "the enormous size of his shoe soles" (121). These are the huge stamping feet, so threatening for beetles, of Malte Brigge's nightmares, but insect squashing is not actually Mr Samsa's purpose. What he wants is to make absolutely sure his son remembers he is human. Gregor's carapace is not split by his father's feet, nor penetrated by the walking stick with which he earlier threatened him. It is breached instead by one of a series of apples with which his father bombards him, and which embeds itself, festering, in his shell for over a month. The apple, like *Hell*'s narrator's skull, weighs Gregor down with human consciousness. His Edenic walls are denied him; his innocent crawling arrested. The fallen insect is also a Fallen Man.

His human consciousness retrieved, Gregor is reminded of his attachment to the writing desk where he once did his homework, and to the chest where he kept his fretsaw and other tools of the man-about-the-house. Household items are steeped in memory, and make good mooring stations for modernist thinkers. The narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" anchors herself by tying herself to the bed, and the narrator of "The Mark on the Wall", initially excited by the unexplained disappearance of her birdcages

and coal scuttles, wakes from nightmares to "worship" her reassuringly solid chest of drawers (Woolf 1917: 84, 88). The fear of a life stripped of memory is, in these texts, an understandable fear of the void. Their protagonists' attachment to furniture is, however, unquestionably a relapse – a retreat from the modern world. In Edith Wharton's "The Reckoning" the drawing room of Julia Westall's first marriage is "alive with memories", and is perceived by Julia as (decoratively speaking) at a more primitive evolutionary stage than her current, more minimally furnished drawing room (Wharton 1902: 314). In *Jude the Obscure* Arabella Donn moves easily through the modern world, while Jude is hopelessly dragged down by other people's "impedimenta", and Sue backs away, shuddering, from the furniture that threatens to weigh her down. While Gregor capers up and down his walls, he is unencumbered by memory. His furniture, though, is so heavy with it that it is impossible for Grete to move it without her mother's help. Like the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" who, having tried to "lift and push" her bed "until [she] was lame", finally bites it impotently and gives up (Gilman 1892: 46), the two women exhaust themselves by dragging and pulling the chest they are utterly unable to lift, even together. The writing desk, meanwhile, is so heavy it has "almost sunk into the floor" – literally embedded itself in the room (Kafka 1915: 118). In *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* Rosner argues that there is "an incongruous connection" between modernism and "acts like rearranging the furniture" (Rosner 2005: 129). In E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910), for example, furniture repositioning is "an exercise in the cleaning up of reminiscences", and the Schlegel women "must literally and figuratively clean the house in order to make a future" (133). When the Samsa parents thwart Grete's decluttering project, then, and proceed to reclutter Gregor's room to make room for three boarders, they are effectively denying him a future.

It is not just clutter that renders Gregor immobile, but the dirt it attracts. As the room fills with unrequired household items that are "simply flung" there until it becomes a "junk heap", Grete loses interest in cleaning it (Kafka 1915: 128). As a result, "streaks of dirt stretch […] along the walls", and "balls of dust and filth" lie scattered on the floor (126). Like old furniture, according to Rosner, in the modernist text dirt is "something old that has outstayed its welcome, like the crust of yesterday's dinner on today's frying pan. Dirt is residue, one of the ways the past manages to hang on" (Rosner 2005: 90). This is certainly Gregor's experience. Once his creeping is restricted to the floor, his body collects dust, fluff, hair and rotten remnants of food. Already

weighed down by the decomposing apple, he is now further hampered by filth. The future belongs to the boarders, whose "passion for order" means that "superfluous, not to say dirty, objects they could not bear" (Kafka 1915: 127). Although the living-room door is now left open, Gregor, who is just such an object, lies forgotten and invisible in the darkness of his room, his agile insect body grounded by human detritus. Attracted by his sister's violin, he makes one final, painful journey into the living room next door. It is partly an animal instinct that drives him (to lure Grete back to his den and "never let her out", while he "watch[es] all the doors of his room at once and spit[s] at intruders"), and partly a contradictory human ambition to send her to the Conservatorium to study music (131). But he is beaten back by the boarders' disgust, and locked in for the final time by Grete herself. Too scandalously animal to resume his place the human side of his bedroom wall – to "take the family's affairs in hand again just as he used to do" – and yet too lumpishly human to be an effective insect, he is hopelessly hybrid (125). There is, as Citati puts it, "nothing left for Gregor to do but die" (Citati 1990: 72).

The narrators of "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Mark on the Wall" retain the freedom of their rooms, despite interruptions. Woolf's narrator can, presumably, return to her ruminations as soon as her husband's back is turned, and Gilman's narrator continues to creep, regardless of John's intrusion. All creeping in *The Metamorphosis*, however, ceases with the death of the creeper – a death made all the more absolute by the sudden withdrawal of the narrator who has, until now, virtually shared his consciousness. The "last faint flicker of [Gregor's] breath" is the exhalation of an abandoned human soul by a disabled insect body (Kafka 1915: 135). All that remains, "completely flat and dry", is his desiccated insect casing (137). Like Jude's, it is an obscure death, which no-one notices until the charwoman enters his room perfunctorily to clean it. And, like Jude's wife, once Gregor is dead his family cannot wait to get outside. Leaving the charwoman to sweep up his carcase, the Samsas move first to the newly opened window, where they stand for a while, "clasping each other tight", then decide to take a day trip to the country (139). In a tram "filled with warm sunshine" they agree that "the greatest immediate improvement in their condition" would be to move to a "smaller and cheaper but also better situated and more easily run apartment than the one they had, which Gregor had selected". Gregor's body and room are both, now, superfluous husks, but there is a survivor in this story, to offset the corpse; and it is the survivors of twentieth-century fiction that, as I will demonstrate in the next

chapter, begin to intrigue me. Out in the open air, unencumbered by their unproductive son and his anachronistic apartment, Mr and Mrs Samsa notice their daughter's emerging nubility. Grete, it seems, thrives without walls. The stretching of her young body in the novella's last sentence is an optimistic flexing that mirrors Gregor's on his emergence from under the sofa at the height of his metamorphosis; but while he was myopically expressing his acceptance of his room as his universe, she, like Arabella Fawley, is embracing the world.

Gilman's hysteric, Barbusse's voyeur, Woolf's dreamer and Kafka's house beetle are specimens, confined to their rooms by authors who wish to examine interior reality under strictly controlled conditions; and they show no sign of resistance. Rooms are cocoons, in these texts – even when they are intended to be prisons, or transpire to be coffins – and their occupants' ready retreat is always, ultimately, an act of denial. These protagonists are neglecting their windows, while they maintain their fanatic focus on the walls that surround them, and cling to their furniture in a despairing bid to anchor themselves to history. History, actually, continues to rage behind their carefully locked doors, though they strive not to notice it; and their walls, skulls and carapaces struggle to keep out an importunate external world. The interior is no longer appropriate, or viable, as a long-term human habitat; and it is because Grete Samsa is willing to emerge from it, and dip her toe in the modern maelstrom, that she, like Hardy's Arabella, will survive. The next chapter considers two texts that lengthen their focus, in order to observe how man constructs, cares for, negotiates, and writes about, the structures and surfaces of the mid-twentieth-century city.

3.

Walking Giedion's Tightrope: The Quest for Equipoise in Two New York Novels

When Friedrich Nietzsche's madman jumps into the crowded market place in *The Gay Science* (1882), his harangue is a manifestation of a familiar abyssal dread:

> 'We have killed [God] – you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? […] What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually, backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?' (Nietzsche 1882: 181)

In *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (1982) Marshall Berman points out certain rhetorical similarities between the writing of Nietzsche, "who is generally perceived as a primary source of many of the modernisms of our time", and that of Karl Marx, "who is not ordinarily associated with any sort of modernism at all" (Berman 1982: 19). One of the shared figures he notices is the experience of modernity expressed as structural dissolution, on a cosmic scale. In *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) the nineteenth century – "the epoch of the bourgeoisie", as characterised by Marx (Marx and Engels 1848: 220) – is an embodied concept which, like Nietzsche's secular one, wheels through an unbounded universe of "everlasting uncertainty and agitation":

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind (223).

In the twentieth century Sigfried Giedion, the influential historian and architectural critic, held to the custom of describing modernity in spatial terms. In the forward to the first edition of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), a collection of essays based on a series of lectures delivered at Harvard University between 1938 and 1939, he represents the twentieth century as an epoch struggling to cope with a series of structural disintegrations that emerged in the century that preceded it – unnatural disconnections between thought and feeling, art and science and, particularly, between man and the external world (Giedion 1941: 13, 17, 165). In *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948) he reiterates his anxiety for a damaged epoch, and goes on to prescribe a remedy:

> Our period demands a type of man who can restore the lost equilibrium between inner and outer reality. This equilibrium, never static but, like reality itself, involved in continuous change, is like that of a tightrope dancer who, by small adjustments, keeps a continuous balance between his being and empty space. We need a type of man who can control his own existence by the process of balancing forces often regarded as irreconcilable: man in equipoise (Giedion 1948: 720).

In an epoch in which solidity has, in the formulations of Giedion and his predecessors, been so resoundingly compromised, it is, perhaps, not surprising that the tightrope walker should emerge as the hero of the hour. In "Man is a Rope", an essay written to accompany Catherine Yass's film installation *High Wire* (2008), Steven Connor analyses his cultural significance. Funambulism, he argues, "has acquired new meanings in the modern world, most of them having to do with an adjustment to the evaporation of religious and other certainties" (Connor 2008). An anarchic form of entertainment in Medieval Europe ("a liberty-taking and often lubricious cavorting on a rope", as Connor puts it), was appropriated in Christian rhetoric as a trope through which to advocate "a steady and temperate holding of the line". In a more secular age, though, caution seems a less useful virtue. The tightrope walker in the prologue to Nietzsche's *Thus Sprach Zarathustra* (1883), Connor points out, falls to his death because he is walking his tightrope too slowly; taking it too seriously (Nietzsche 1883: 48). The jester, meanwhile, nimbly jumps over him, and completes the crossing without a backward glance. "In the modern world", Connor argues, "wire-walkers are not heroes but clowns, who offer better company, seem better, as the Americans say, to hang with" (Connor 2008). In *All that is Solid Melts into Air* Berman comes to a similar conclusion. "To be modern", he asserts, "is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts into air" (Berman 1982: 345). "To be a modern*ist*", on the other hand, is to "make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows" (345-6). The difference between "modern" and "modernist" is a fundamental difference in sensibility, which determines one's chances of survival in an epoch in which physical and metaphysical structures are relentlessly besieged. Berman's "modernist" adapts to the maelstrom for the same

reason that Giedion's tightrope walker keeps his footing. "Better to hang with", he fits in, because he frets less.

Giedion's well-balanced type has not featured prominently in the texts so far examined. On the contrary, as they have careered between competing spatial phobias the protagonists of early twentieth-century fiction have seemed to demonstrate a pathological inability to decide whether they should focus on their "being" or on the "empty space" in which it teeters: whether they are better off inside or out; clinging to the material world or running from it; breaching the walls that surround them, or shoring them up. Woolf's narrator's thoroughly modernist fantasy of being stripped naked whilst she is blasted through a London tube tunnel is offset by her acknowledged dependency on the anchorage afforded by her nice, solid chest of drawers; and Gregor Samsa, Jude Fawley and Julia Westall harbour similarly contradictory feelings for their furniture. It dogs them and weighs them down, and yet they are miserably vulnerable without it. Apertures, in these texts, are also approached with ambivalence. Windows are jumped from or shunned with equal assiduity, while doors, terrifyingly unlockable for the agoraphobic, for the claustrophobic remain forbiddingly shut. And the narrator of *Hell*, initially fascinated by holes (whether in walls or body), ends up plugging them, for all he is worth, to make absolutely sure the outside remains where it is. It is small wonder, perhaps, that he should want to draw architecture around him, like a blanket. Outside his window, after all, he can see that "the stars are pushing the sky away from me, the city plunges down at my feet, [and] the horizon flees eternally from me on every side" (Barbusse 1908: 199). To live out there in the modern world would be, for him, to reel, vertiginously, in infinite space. The characters that begin to interest me, though, are those who show signs of surviving the century *without* walling themselves up. Their survival, it seems to me, cannot be disassociated from a certain metaphysical stance. Arabella Donn and Grete Samsa step into the world with no sign of discomfort, once they have rid themselves of their phobic relatives; and a crucial factor in their success seems to be their relaxed response to dissolving conceptual boundaries between self and world. While modern fiction is strewn with the corpses of those who respond either by immuring themselves, or by hurling themselves into free fall, or by both in succession, these literary tightrope walkers seem always to maintain their composure; and their "equipoise", I suggest, is the result of insouciance, rather than courage. They care less than their phobic contemporaries about whether they are inside or out. They read less into walls; and, if they resist architecture at all, they do so with subtlety –

making use of it, if it suits them, or evading it, if not. What they have, I am arguing, is a flexible attitude to structure.

An interrogation of structure is, of course, central to twentieth-century art, and it is this, I believe, that drives the avant-garde writer's interest in walls. In "What is English Literature", one of her *Lectures in America* (1935), Gertrude Stein situates her writing in the context of a literary *zeitgeist*. "It is nice", after all, "thinking how different each century is and the reason why", and "it is also nice to think about how differently the words sound one next to each other in each century and why" (Stein 1935: 28). When she characterises the nineteenth century as a period "when the inside had become so solidly inside that all the outside could be outside and still the inside was all inside", she is outlining the assumptions of the literary realist, for whom there was no confusion between subject and world – no leakage, or border area. What was different about the twentieth century, she says in another of the lectures, was that writers "suddenly began to feel the outside inside and the inside outside and it was perhaps not so exciting but it was very interesting. Anyway it was quite exciting" (205). With interior and exterior reality less rigidly demarcated, writers were granted the creative freedom to experiment with the way both were represented. And it was not just public and private space that intrigued them, but the wall that divided them.

It was not literal architecture, though, that held their attention, for all its prominence in the texts I have selected. Even Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* (1943), as Rand herself insisted in a letter written to the developer Donald Helgeson in 1951, is "actually *not* a novel about architecture – or rather, architecture is merely the background I use for a theme which applies to all human activities and professions" (Berliner 1995: 492). Rand's "theme", philosophical and political, was the relationship between man and world, and to what extent he should compromise and cooperate to live in it. The central tenet of her "objectivist" philosophical system was that "existence exists", independently of the human mind (Rand 1957: 942). She believed, with Jean-Paul Sartre, that "existence precedes essence"; that "essence" is defined by the individual; and that "there is no determinism: man is free, man is freedom" (Sartre 1946: 22, 29). Where she differed from Sartre was in her consequent wholesale espousal of *laissez-faire* capitalism; and in this she differed, too, from one of her contemporaries: the African-American novelist, essayist and left-wing campaigner, Ann Petry. There are similarities, though, between *The Fountainhead* and Petry's novel *The Street* (1946), as I will demonstrate in this chapter – illuminating tropical similarities such as

those Berman finds in the writing of Nietzsche and Marx. Both novels are set in New York, and both are "not about architecture"; and yet architecture – the ultimate material structure – is a figure that dominates both. I will demonstrate that Rand and Petry seek an answer to the same question – Who is in charge, ultimately? Man, or building? – and that their philosophical, as well as political, stance is demonstrated in their answers. I will also scrutinize the texts for further occurrences of Giedion's tightrope walker: the twentieth-century "survivor", who neither retreats from the world nor merges with it, but instead succeeds, against all odds, in maintaining a precarious balance between his "being" and the external world.

Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* (1943)

The impulse of the twentieth-century protagonist to retreat – to find shelter behind a solid wall or his own skull ("your little bit of surface hardness", as Rainier Rilke's Malte Brigge characterises it in *The Notebooks* (1910)) – is, I suggest, prompted by his sense of the meaninglessness, and formlessness, of existence outside it (Rilke 1910: 69). The eponymous hero of Samuel Beckett's *Murphy* (1938), for example, is in no hurry to restore, as Giedion advises, the "lost" equilibrium between inner and outer reality. On the contrary, he seeks only to preserve any schism he finds between body and mind, thought and feeling, self and other, self and universe. He likes to envision his mind as "a large hollow sphere, hermetically closed to the universe without"; his ideal environment is a padded cell; and he dies in a room in which he has battened down all hatches and stopped all openings – except, that is, the lethal gas pipe leading to his radiator (Beckett 1938: 63). The protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* (also published in 1938) is a similar solipsist. Consciousness, for Antoine Roquentin, is "a small living and impersonal transparency", completely surrounded by walls; and, unlike Woolf's walls in "The Mark on the Wall", they are not easily effaced (Sartre 1938: 241). "Even if I stay", he laments: "Even if I curl up quietly in a corner, I shan't forget myself. I shall be there, I shall weigh on the floor. I am" (146). As, it seems, existence is not to be avoided, Roquentin welcomes its containment. Like Beckett's Murphy, and also like the narrator of *Hell*, he basks in what Sartre elsewhere calls the "absolute interiority" of the consciousness (Sartre 1943: 327), and worries about the threat posed to it by an outside that threatens to worm its way in "through the eyes, through the nose, through the mouth" (Sartre 1938: 181). And if his own bodily orifices make him anxious, those of other people positively turn his stomach. Mouths are "obscene little

hole[s]", "throbbing, yawning" and "all wet with transparent pus" (230, 148). Ringed by "wet sugary lips" which "cry like eyes", they are disgusting conduits to others' insides (148). But what nauseates Roquentin more than anything else is the potential of insides to *burst out*. When walking along the sea front, he sees more than he wants to of his fellow strollers. Before his horrified gaze "the varnishes melt, the shining little velvety skins, God's little peach-skins, explode everywhere under my gaze, they split and yawn open!" (179). Existence, as far as he is concerned, should be contained and controlled, but the world persists in displaying an absurd impotence. "Thrusting towards the sky?", he exclaims when he sees the chestnut trees in the Bouville park: "Collapsing, rather: at any moment I expected to see the trunks shrivel like weary pricks, curl up and fall to the ground in a soft, black crumpled heap" (191). These are a far cry from the tree revered by the narrator at the end of "The Mark on the Wall" which, a "naked mast" with "nothing tender exposed", stands rigid in its field, its "close-furled" leaves successfully containing the "slow delicious ooze of sap" taking place inside (Woolf 1917: 88-9). Woolf's tree is a reassuring reminder of an objective universe, discrete, definite and external, but Sartre's allows a nauseating leakage of an existence that is "all soft, gumming everything up, all thick, a jelly" (Sartre 1938: 192). Both inner and outer realities are dribbling, unbounded, formless obscenities, and there is no credible boundary between them. Roquentin is not just temperamentally unsuited to funambulism: there is no tightrope for him to walk.

The claim, widely cited, that Ayn Rand said she chose the name "objectivism" for her philosophical system because "existentialism" had already been taken is, as far as I have been able to establish, erroneous. It was Leonard Peikoff, her intellectual disciple and legal heir, who said that "existentialism" was the ideal term for his idol's system, but that it had been had been "pre-empted by a school that advocates *Das Nichts*, i.e. *non*existence" (Peikoff 1991: 36). There is, however, no doubt that there are points of contact between Rand's ideas and those of the existentialists – particularly Sartre, who was her precise contemporary (they were born in the same year, and he pre-deceased her by only two years). *The Fountainhead* shares *Nausea's* loathing for the internal, the wet and the porous – for anything that suggests a disintegration of the boundaries between inner and outer, self and other. In *Nausea* the autodidact's orthodox humanism turns humans into "white, frothy lymph" (Sartre 1938: 170); and in *The Fountainhead* collectivism is a "drooling beast", and compassion for one's fellow man is "what one feels when one looks at a squashed caterpillar" (Rand 1943: 635, 288). In

both novels people are metonymically represented by their mouths, throats and the contents of their stomachs; and water, in both, is a particularly horrifying symbol of faulty differentiation. On his walks by the sea *Nausea*'s Roquentin is always mindful of what seethes beneath its innocuous-looking surface. "The *real* sea", he insists, "is cold and black, full of animals; it crawls underneath this thin green film which is designed to deceive people" (Sartre 1938: 179). Gail Wynand, one of *The Fountainhead*'s several unrealised heroes, is driven to the brink of suicide by a "kind of disgust that made it seem as if the whole world were under water and the water stood still, water that had backed up out of the sewers and ate into everything, even the sky, even my brain" (Rand 1943: 569). The novel's villain Ellsworth Toohey, on the other hand, displays no such hydrophobic symptoms. His column for the New York *Banner* offers water as a tempting symbol of collectivism, maintaining that modern man should welcome every opportunity "to merge his self in a great current, in the rising tide which is approaching to sweep us all, willing or unwilling, into the future" (103). It is by promoting this dissolution of self, indeed, that Toohey establishes his fiendish ascendancy over the citizens of New York. His genial insistence that "'we are all brothers under the skin" is succeeded by the more menacing promise that "'I, for one, would be willing to skin humanity to prove it'" (312). Incited to shed the boundaries that separate them, people begin to "ooze toward Toohey" in a wet mass, their power of self-determination hopelessly compromised by his bewitching collectivist credo (308).

One of those so attracted is the young architect, Peter Keating; and the consequences of his seduction, I suggest, are Rand's warning against postmodernist excess. At the time of *The Fountainhead's* publication Robert Venturi had not yet delivered the lecture on which his "Nonstraightforward Architecture: A Gentle Manifesto" (1966) was based, and yet it seems to advocate everything to which Keating aspires in Rand's novel. Venturi demands an architecture that is "hybrid rather than 'pure', compromising, rather than 'clean', distorted rather than 'straightforward', ambiguous rather than 'articulated' […], redundant rather than simple […], inconsistent and equivocal rather than direct and clear" (Venturi 1966: 16). When Keating first appears, newly graduated from the Stanton Institute of Technology and the darling of the architectural establishment, his promise is reflected as much in his body and temperament as in the buildings he designs. His athletic physique displays "a certain classical perfection", and he enters the most prestigious architectural firm in New York

as he enters all environments, "soft and bright as a sponge to be filled, unresisting, with the air and the mood of the place" (Rand 1943: 17, 43). It is this sponginess, though, that proves his downfall. As the novel progresses Keating loses his heroic appearance, steadily gaining weight until the once beautiful lines of his face look as if they have been "drawn on a blotter and ha[ve] spread, blurring" (589). His work, meanwhile, is a model response to the postmodern call for "messy vitality over obvious unity" (Venturi 1966: 16): his buildings so bulge with plagiarised ideas that they resemble "coils of toothpaste when somebody steps on the tube or a stylised version of the lower intestine" (Rand 1943: 588). By the end of the novel Keating cuts as pathetic a figure as Hardy's Jude. Impure, weighed down by superfluity, confused by the "complexity and contradiction" Venturi espouses (Venturi 1966: 16), he is as hopelessly oedematose as his buildings: "wet, from the bones out", saturated with the opinions of others (Rand 1943: 621).

There is nothing wet, on the other hand, about Howard Roark. Newly expelled from the same institution that covered Keating in glory, Rand's hero stands on the edge of a cliff at the novel's opening, naked and laughing. The cliff is a "frozen explosion of granite" that seems "anchored" to his feet; his body is composed of "long straight lines and angles, each curve broken into planes"; and his face is "closed like the door of a safety vault" (3). The lake beneath him holds none of the insinuating menace of Wynand's unspeakable flood. To Roark, on the contrary, it appears "only [as] a thin steel ring that cuts the rocks in half" (52). He "drinks a great deal of water", we are told, although we never see him eat, but the "cold, glittering liquid" is securely contained in a lean, well-waterproofed stomach that allows no seepage, leakage or inundation (204). While the buildings Keating designs are sodden and swollen with unnecessary display, his are dry, spare, scrubbed clean of ornament. His name resonates with rock, Noah and his ark. Roark, like the fountainhead of the title, has water under control.

Keating's spongy openness to his fellow man renders him pathetically vulnerable to penetration. When one of his plagiarised designs wins a prestigious competition, the public response is the stuff of nightmares:

> It began with the thin ringing of a telephone, announcing the names of the winners. Then every phone in the office joined in, screaming, bursting from under the fingers of the operator who could barely control the switchboard; calls from every paper in town, from famous architects, questions, demands for interviews, congratulations. Then the flood rushed out of the elevators, poured through the office doors, the messages, the telegrams, the people Keating knew, the people he had never seen before, the reception clerk

> losing all sense, not knowing whom to admit or refuse, and Keating shaking hands, an endless stream of hands like a wheel with soft moist cogs flapping against his fingers (186).

Rand juxtaposes this scene with another, in which Roark, in an office on the other side of town, waits patiently for his first commission. Slumped across his desk, his hand resting on a silent telephone, he sits through "days of silence, of silence in the office, silence in the whole city, of silence within him", and watches his letterbox for an envelope that never arrives (189). With "nothing else left to him of the world" than "the slot in the door and the telephone", his position seems unenviable; and yet, because he has only two conduits to monitor, he has considerably more control over his contact with the world than the hapless Keating. The clients Rand eventually allows to approach Roark are discerning, unaffected people, who are willing to entrust their dream houses to one they recognise as an expert. When the newspaper columnist Austen Heller stammers his hopes for a house with "'some unity, some...central idea [...] cleaner, more clear-cut...what's the word I've heard used? [...] integrated...'", Roark "thr[ows] his head up at once, for a flash of a second, to look at him across the table" (121). The fleeting glance is "all the introduction they needed; it was like a handshake". While Keating shakes a million moist hands and tries to please them all, Roark shakes one, and an exemplary architect/client relationship is forged.

Rand insists, always, on Roark's individuality. Even his hair – "the exact color of ripe orange rind" – is designed to distinguish him from the mass (3). Excluded from the academy as authoritatively as Hardy's Jude, he feels none of the stonemason's distress. He joins no fraternities, seeks no friends, cares nothing for what other people think, and feels no desire to influence them. "'I don't work with collectives'", he informs a potential client: "'I don't consult, I don't co-operate, I don't collaborate'" (537). He is not, however, entirely impervious to other people, as the Heller handshake reveals. It is quite possible, according to *Fountainhead* dogma, for one's barriers to be *too* efficient. Roark is happy to lower his defences for the like-minded because he has the ability, unlike Keating, to limit his penetrability. "'I'm not capable of suffering completely'" he tells his friends: "'It goes only down to a certain point and then it stops. As long as there is that untouched point, it's really not pain'" (354). This is an equanimity his mentor, the arch-modernist Henry Cameron, finds impossible to understand. Cameron has "never known how to face people. They did not matter to him, as his own life did not matter, as nothing mattered but buildings" (35). Ultimately

his stubborn impenetrability renders him as vulnerable as porosity renders Keating; and his punishment for failing to adapt is to be expelled not only from the architectural establishment, but from New York City itself. From a wheelchair in his New Jersey garden he devotes the rest of his life to watching the skyscrapers glitter in the distance, like "clouds condensed on glass, gray-blue clouds frozen for an instant in straight angles and vertical shafts, with the sunset caught in the spires" (92). The alluring New York skyline is as unattainable, for Cameron, as the spires of Christminster are for Jude.

Dominique Francon has been expelled from two finishing schools and is, like Roark, Jude and Sue Bridehead, no creature of the establishment. Ferociously self-contained, for her the notion of a collaborative world, where "'everything has strings leading to everything else; we're all so tied together'", is a dreadful prospect (140). Morbidly tactile defensive, she avoids relationships, projects, jobs, anything that may lead to dependence on others, so that she may stay "clean and free in a single passion – to touch nothing". Above all she loathes the streets, and the people (the "'many and smutty and small'") with which they swarm (511). It is a modernist loathing. In *The Radiant City* (1933) Le Corbusier uses extravagantly pathological terms to designate the street a "dismal and suppurating zone" of "indescribable filth" and "creeping and purulent decay"; a "leprosy", and a "shameful skin disease" (Le Corbusier 1933: 118, 178). It is partly the sight of architectural detritus that provokes him to draw up his skirts in disgust – old buildings which he urges city authorities to demolish so that modern citizens may, from an environmental clean slate, soar upwards in skyscrapers that "rise up sheer from the ground, clear and glittering, straight and pure, calm and secure" – but it is also the sight of the street's inhabitants ("millions of them") that mill at their feet (178, 93). This is the same "weltering humanity, hideously multiplied" from which Sue Bridehead recoils in *Jude the Obscure* (Hardy 1896: 341). Like Sue, Le Corbusier shudders at the prospect of the unhygienic masses reproducing to the point where they become "simply a dead weight on the city, an obstacle, a black clot of misery, of failure, of human garbage", and Dominique is similarly sickened (Le Corbusier 1933: 137-8). Hers is the twentieth-century intellectual's horror of the "mass" as described by John Carey in *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992) – a horror of the crowd, conceived as undifferentiated mess – and Dominque is not the only one of *The Fountainhead*'s characters to feel it (Carey 1992: 21). As he walks through Hell's Kitchen the newspaper mogul Gail Wynand recoils from the mingled odours of rotting vegetables and river water: from "the equality of the junk heap" he

sees paraded by pawn shops, and from the "decay without reticence, past the need of privacy or shame" which is clearly visible in squalid back yards (Rand 1943: 690, 693). In Rand's New York, as in Le Corbusier's not-so-radiant city, the mean and the dirty are to be found at ground level … or, indeed, sometimes even lower. It seems nothing could be worse than the streets of Hell's Kitchen, but there *is* worse, and it is to be found beneath them. Walking over a subway grating, Wynand is assaulted by "an odor of dust, sweat and dirty clothing, worse than the smell of stockyards, because it had a homey, normal quality, like decomposition made routine" (690). His conclusion that "this is the residue of many people put together, of human bodies pressed into a mass, with no space to move, with no air to breathe" echoes the urgent question posed in *The Radiant City*:

> How is it possible to breathe properly in these torrid canyons of summer heat; how can anyone risk bringing up children in that air tainted with dust and soot […] how can anyone achieve the serenity indispensable to life, how can anyone relax, or ever give a cry of joy, or laugh, or breathe, or feel drunk with sunlight? (Le Corbusier 1933: 91).

The love of skyscrapers Wynand and Dominique share with Le Corbusier is, perhaps, scarcely to be wondered at. Viewed by Dominique from the Staten Island ferry, they look like "triumphant masts […] raised out of the struggle", and by Wynand from the depths of Hell's Kitchen they "rise, unhindered, above the sagging roofs, shoot[ing their] gracious tension to the stars, out of the slack, the tired, the accidental" (Rand 1943: 317, 694). "Arrows of steel shooting upward without weight or limit" (34), they have the appeal of the mountains in Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1883: 122). Soaring above the loathsome mass – priapic, potent, clean and self-contained – they are a glorious symbol of escape.

Rand's "ideal man" (as she designated Roark in her 1968 introduction to *The Fountainhead*) shows youthful promise, though he has a long way to go before he lands the commission to build the skyscraper-to-end-all-skyscrapers with which the novel ends (Rand 1943: ix). Roark's early designs are "sketches of buildings such as had never stood on the face of the earth", that pay no heed to architectural precedent; and the buildings he goes on to design, whether they be filling stations, hotels or housing estates, are "symphon[ies] played by an inexhaustible imagination" – "music in stone", but with "the discipline of reason applied" (7, 529). When Dominique visits the construction site of one of his early commissions, she is determined not to be impressed. Her high-heeled disrespect, though, is quickly knocked out of her by the "incredible

complexity of this shape coming to life as a simple, logical whole, a naked skeleton with planes of air to form the walls, a naked skeleton on a cold winter day, with a sense of birth and promise, like a bare tree with a first touch of green" (292). Her perverse mission to demolish Roark's architectural reputation bears no relation to her judgement of his work. It is born, rather, of her fear that women will "hang diapers on his terraces", and men "spit on his stairways and draw dirty pictures on his walls" (249). Roark "should have committed suicide", she pronounces, before he permitted a single one of his "planes of air" to be defiled by the masses and their hideous fluids. The novel, however, does not endorse her extravagant view. Roark himself expects his buildings to be lived in. "'I love this work'", he says to Keating of the Cortlandt Housing Project: "'I want to see it erected. I want to make it real, living, functioning, built'" (606). As it turns out Cortlandt *is* defiled – so defiled that Roark dynamites it – but not by its occupants. It is violated, before it is ever inhabited, by other architects. A design born "whole, pure, complete, unbroken" of a "single thought" in an individual brain – a design in which form and function are perfectly unified – is altered, added to, and mutilated by Rand's *bête noire*: collaboration.

In his essay "Howard Roark and Frank Lloyd Wright" (2007) Michael Berliner works hard to find evidence that the latter was a model for the former, despite Rand's own insistence that there was no connection between the fictional architect and the real (Berliner 2007: 41-64). It seems to me that there is rather more evidence that it was Wright, in his writing, who was inspired by Roark. In *The Natural House* (1954), for example, Wright asserts that "what is needed most in architecture today is the very thing that is most needed in life – integrity. Just as it is in a human being, so integrity is the deepest quality in a building" (Wright 1954: 292). This is precisely the view that is expressed by Roark, early in *The Fountainhead*, at his expulsion interview with the Dean of Stanton:

> 'A building is alive, like a man. Its integrity is to follow its own truth, its one single theme, and to serve its own single purpose. A man doesn't borrow pieces of his body. A building doesn't borrow hunks of its soul. Its maker gives it the soul and every wall, window and stairway to express it' (Rand 1943: 12).

Nothing is more likely to send Roark running from a commission, however lucrative, than the phrase "on one minor condition"; and if compromise is anathema, so is reproduction (194). "'Every building is like a person'", he insists, "'single and

unrepeatable'" (480). A building's form should be determined by its purpose, its site and the material from which it is to be constructed, and nothing else. Its outside should match its inside, and should not camouflage its function. There should be, therefore, no façade. A philosophy that advocates the savage severance of architecture from ornament, history and audience is deeply alarming to the Dean. When Roark's response to his pontifications (that "'it has been proved by all the authorities that everything beautiful in architecture has been done already'", and that "'the proper creative process is a slow, gradual, anonymous, collective one, in which man collaborates with all the others and subordinates himself to the standards of the majority'") is "'Why?'", he has to reassure himself that "no […] no, he hasn't said anything else; it's a perfectly innocent word; he's not threatening me" (11). Keating's mother, with whom Roark lodges at the time, has a similar dim feeling of threat:

> He always made her feel uncomfortable in the house, with a vague feeling of apprehension, as if she were waiting to see him swing out suddenly and smash her coffee tables, her Chinese vases, her framed photographs. He had never shown any inclination to do so. She kept expecting it, without knowing why (6).

The fears of the Dean and Mrs Keating – that anyone capable of attacking the Parthenon for its lack of integrity is probably also a danger to ornaments – are not unwarranted. When the brilliant sculptor Stephen Mallory produces a bargain-basement plaster baby, Roark disapproves so violently he smashes it against a wall. In his article "Modernism and Destruction in Architecture" (2006) Vladimir Paperny argues persuasively that Rand (who lived in Russia for the first twenty-nine years of her life) was influenced by the Russian Futurists, for whom "old" signified substandard, over-decorated, adulterated and fake, and whose rhetoric bristles with the lust for demolition (Paperny 2006). Roark, of course, does not stop at disfiguring ornaments. He also blows up Cortlandt.

While *The Fountainhead* unequivocally favours those architects who "inherit nothing" from the "twenty centuries unrolling in moldering ruins" behind them, it also offers another face of modernism – a vulgar face, upon which it frowns (Rand 1943: 13, 35). One of Roark's early employers commissions him to design "'something modern. Understand? Modern, violent, crazy, to knock their eye out. Don't restrain yourself. Go to the limit. Pull any stunt you can think of, the goofier the better'" (96),

and the writer Lois Cook (a very thinly disguised Gertrude Stein) later gives Keating her specifications for a house that befits "a genius":

> 'I want a living room without windows […] No windows, a tile floor and a black ceiling. And no electricity. I want no electricity in my house, just kerosene lamps. Kerosene lamps with chimneys, and candles. To hell with Thomas Edison! Who was he anyway? And, Keating, I want the house to be *ugly*. Magnificently *ugly*. I want it to be the ugliest house in New York. Sweetheart, the beautiful is so commonplace' (245).

Lois's house is a building without ornament but, as its determining motive is its audience, it fails to meet Rand's stringent specifications. The group of writers over which Lois presides is lampooned by the novel, and journalists, too, are treated with disdain. When Le Corbusier denounces the newspaper as a "destroyer of personalities which we read in the subway, in trains, at the meal table, in our beds" (Le Corbusier 1933: 151), he is echoing the sentiments of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, for whom newspapers are "repulsive verbal swill" that contributes to street mire (Nietzsche 1883: 196). For Rand, too, journalism is "like used chewing gum, chewed and rechewed, spat out and picked up again, passing from mouth to mouth to pavement to shoe sole to mouth to brain" (Rand 1943: 572). It bypasses the intellect, elevates the second-rate, and promotes the collectivism she despises. During one of his city walks Roark is distracted from his appreciation of the "naked masses of stone, glass, asphalt and sharp corners" that surround him by a trash basket on a street corner, where "a crumpled sheet of newspaper [is] rustling, beating convulsively against the wire mesh" (199). The "naked masses of stone" are to be respected for their austerity, steadiness and longevity. Writing, on the other hand, is rubbish, and blows with the wind. Later in the novel the wind again picks up a sheet of newspaper, and this time blows it against Dominique's legs. There it clings "with a tight insistence that seemed conscious, like the peremptory caress of a cat" (483). In response Dominique "bent, picked up the paper and began folding it, to keep it". Roark, annoyed, "snatched the paper from her, crumpled it and flung it away into the weeds" (484). Writing is corrupt, transitory, dirty and low. It belongs in the gutter with the masses and their swill, and Dominique must learn to reject it.

In *The Fountainhead*, then, the battle between the hard and the soft, the dry and the wet, the high and the low, is a battle between architecture and writing; and for a long time it is a battle that writing seems to be winning. Toohey revels in the power his column gives him to make and break architects' reputations. In one of his favourite

fantasies he envisages the keyboard of an enormous typewriter on which each key represents an architect's name: "each controlling a special field, each hitting, leaving its mark, and the whole making connected sentences on a vast blank sheet" (583). His column destroys architects as easily as it enshrines them: by smearing them, sneering at them, ignoring them or demoting their names to its footnotes. Toohey laughs at the skyscrapers *The Fountainhead*'s protagonists hold in such high esteem, confident that, "by pressing [his] little finger against one spot", he can make the city "crumble into a worthless heap of scrap iron" (586). Wynand, meanwhile, is the owner of the *Banner*, and his fantasies extend beyond the single typewriter to his vast news empire. He looks out at New York from the window of the Banner Building, and imagines:

> … the presses thundering from ocean to ocean, […] the papers, the lustrous magazine covers, the light rays trembling through newsreels, the wires coiling over the world, the power flowing into every palace, every capital, every secret, crucial room, day and night (574).

When, aged sixteen, Wynand looked at the city and asked himself: "What was there that entered all those houses, the dim and brilliant alike, what reached into every room, every person?", writing was the answer on which he settled (420). Writing has the power to penetrate both walls and skulls, and he who controls it rules the world.

Writing, though, is not as strong as it seems. Wynand's control over the masses has, as it turns out, been dependent on their cooperation, and it only takes a "We Don't Read Wynand" poster campaign to bring his empire to its knees. As the *Banner*'s circulation drops to the point where news vendors refuse to display it, and returned copies block the corridors of the Banner Building, Wynand looks out over the city once more, and it dawns on him that the current in its power lines has not been flowing in the direction he has always assumed:

> At the supper tables, in the drawing rooms, in their beds and in their cellars, in their studies and in their bathrooms. Speeding in the subways under your feet. Crawling up in elevators through vertical cracks around you. Jolting past you in every bus. Your masters, Gail Wynand. There is a net – longer than the cables that coil through the walls of this city, larger than the mesh of pipes that carry water, gas and refuse – there is another hidden net around you; it is strapped to you, and the wires lead to every hand in the city. They jerked the wires and you moved. You were a ruler of men. You held a leash. A leash is only a rope with a noose at both ends" (691).

The newspaper mogul, it turns out, is ruled by the people, and not the other way round. As for Toohey, the arsenal of words he presents to the world only barely covers the

puniness of his body and, even at the height of his own water-retentive obesity, Keating is aware of his mentor's physical inferiority. Seeing him in his dressing gown he is reminded "of chicken bones left on a plate after dinner, dried out; if one touches them, it takes no effort at all, they just snap"; and Dominique (another writer) is just as flimsy (596-7). Her physique is lean and hard, like Roark's; but where he is all sinew and lithe tension, she is spiky, nervy, and so brittle that "two hands could encircle her waist completely or snap her figure in half without much effort" (394). When Keating approaches her at a society party he observes that she leans backwards slightly, "as if the air were a support solid enough for her thin, naked shoulder blades" (262). Her evening gown is "the color of glass", and Keating has the uneasy impression that he "should be able to see the wall behind her, through her body", and that she seems "too fragile to exist". These doubts about the robustness of her hold on being are reminiscent of the doubts expressed by all who behold Sue Bridehead in *Jude* and, like Sue, Dominique's fragility signals her frigidity, despite her multiple marriages. Sitting in a restaurant between Keating (her first husband) and Wynand (her second), her white long-sleeved dress is a "nun's garment" that reveals the "cold innocence" of her body and seems to confirm her earlier claim that "'I suppose I'm one of those freaks you hear about, an utterly frigid woman'" (455, 179). In his "Study of Thomas Hardy" (1914) D.H. Lawrence argues that there is a defect in the twentieth-century psyche. The story of evolution has been taken too much to heart, resulting in an overactive desire to escape the "homogenous jelly" of primitive existence (Lawrence 1914: 44). Sue Bridehead's recoil from the "gross impurity" of her physical being is a symptom, says Lawrence, of this defect. Roquentin's distressed "even if I curl up quietly in a corner […] I shall be there, I shall weigh on the floor; I am" illustrates Lawrence's point, and is echoed by several of *The Fountainhead's* protagonists (Sartre 1938: 146). Keating is so disgusted by his own corporeality that he worries about leaving footprints, "like the leaded feet of a deep-sea diver", on Wynand's carpet (Rand 1943: 467). On the other hand he recognises that Dominique's transparent weightlessness is an equally disordered avoidance of being. He accuses her of having become an "'absolute nothing'", a "'blank negation'" who has lost "'the thing inside you […] that thinks and values and makes decisions'" (441). Nauseated as he is by his own fullness, he is also horrified by her emptiness. "'Where's your I?'", he demands. It is not just Dominique's body that has gone missing, but her soul. She is one of the "despisers of the body" Nietzsche's Zarathustra rails against, and can never, therefore, become a "bridge to the Superman"

(Nietzsche 1883: 63). She needs someone to rescue her from "senseless infinity", to show her how to fulfil her duty to occupy space, to fill absence with presence, and nothingness with being (Rand 1943: 442). What Dominique needs is Rand's version of the Superman: a good, solid architect.

The context in which Dominique first sees Roark is a granite quarry hot enough to melt the chilliest of ice maidens:

> When she came out of the woods to the edge of the great stone bowl, she felt as if she were thrust into an execution chamber filled with scalding steam. The heat did not come from the sun, but from that broken cut in the earth, from the reflectors of flat ridges. Her shoulders, her head, her back, exposed to the sky, seemed cool, while she felt the hot breath of the stone rising up her legs, to her chin, to her nostrils. The air shimmered below, sparks of fire shot through the granite; she thought the stone was stirring, melting, running in white trickles of lava. Drills and hammers cracked the still weight of the air. It was obscene to see men on the shelves of the furnace. They did not look like workers, they looked like a chain gang serving an unspeakable penance for some unspeakable crime. She could not turn away (207).

Roark, with his fiery hair, thrusting figure and pounding drill, is a creature of this inferno; and from the moment she sees him Dominique wants him, in his stained workman's clothes, "on the polished steps, between the delicate, rigid banisters" of her glacially furnished country house (214). In her essay "Looking through a Paradigm Darkly" Wendy McElroy satisfactorily dispatches the pages of critical fretting about whether or not the first sexual encounter between these two constitutes rape. After Dominique has deliberately defaced the marble surround of her bedroom fireplace and invited Roark in to repair it she is, as McElroy says, "as thoroughly taken, or ravished, as any woman in the Western literary canon" (McElroy 1999: 163). It is crucial, however, that Dominique wants to *think* of it as rape. In the days that follow she chants to herself "'I've been raped … I've been raped by some redheaded hoodlum from a stone quarry'", and years later she remembers the first night affectionately as the one when she had "something ripped off me and the taste of quarry dust in my teeth" (Rand 1943: 223, 643). A mouthful of quarry dust, for Dominique, is so very much more appealing than a mouthful of anything more viscous, and she gives as good as she gets. Sex for both parties is "an act of violence", "an act of clenched teeth and hatred", "as tense as water made into power by the restraining violence of the dam" (289). This fusion of two hard people, this mutual rape, is expressed in the novel's principal trope – water brought under control.

Dominique has to jump through several hoops, though, before Rand is willing to give her to Roark, and one of them is marriage to Wynand. After a wedding of "lavish, exquisite vulgarity", performed in a floodlit ballroom in the presence of six hundred guests and a mob of reporters, she is willingly squirreled in her new husband's fifty-eighth-floor Manhattan penthouse, the bedroom of which has been converted to a solid, windowless vault (498). Careering from glazed exhibitionism to walled introversion, Wynand is Dominique's phobic soul mate, and for a fortnight she retreats with him in newly-wed bliss. With the telephone disconnected and "no feeling of the fifty-seven floors below them, of steel shafts braced against granite", the city outside is an irrelevance – no more that "an abstraction with which no possible communication could be established" (506). It soon becomes clear to Wynand, however, that his penthouse is not an adequate stronghold; it is only a matter of time before Dominique presses the elevator button and descends to the world. When he commissions Roark to build him a marital home, he explains his yen for privacy:

> 'I can't stand to see my wife among other people. It's not jealousy. It's much more and much worse. I can't stand to see her walking down the streets of a city. I can't share her, not even with shops, theaters, taxicabs or sidewalks. I must take her away. I must put her out of reach – where nothing can touch her, not in any sense. This house is to be a fortress. My architect is to be my guard' (543).

While their approach to beauty differs – Dominique destroys it and Wynand hides it – what drives them both is the desire to protect it from the eyes of the undeserving crowd, massed below on the city's streets.

When Roark voices his opinion that "the things which are sacred or precious to us are the things that we withdraw from promiscuous sharing", he appears to be in full agreement with the Wynands (635). He always gives privacy priority, certainly, in his designs for low-cost housing. But where he parts company from them is in their hysterical recoil from humanity. Early in the novel Cameron asks him: "'Do you ever look at the people in the street? Aren't you afraid of them? I am. They move past you and they wear hats and they carry bundles'" (54). "'But I never notice the people in the street'", is Roark's equable response. The street is unpopulated, as far as he is concerned, which leaves him free to shape it. The task he sets Dominique is to feel as relaxed about it as he does. "'Stop being afraid of it'", he counsels her: "'Learn not to notice it'" (483). He has punctured her icy shell, but it is still essentially intact, and she is using it to keep the external world at bay. During her struggle with Roark on the night

of her ravishment her crystal lamp is smashed, along with the glass shelf of her bedside table. It is a paltry breakage, though, compared to the orgy of shattering she enjoys on the night she helps Roark dynamite Cortlandt. After the explosion she sits in the mangled wreckage of her car and pours handfuls of glass over her body before slashing her neck with a large splinter and collapsing in a satisfied pool of arterial blood. It is from this moment that she begins to allow the world in. "'If they convict you'", she says to Roark, "'if they lock you in jail or put you in a chain gang – if they smear your name in every filthy headline – if they never let you design another building – if they never let me see you again – it will not matter. Only down to a certain point'" (650). This demonstration of a lowering of the barricades is what Roark has been waiting to hear. Dominique has won her spurs, and her reward is to be pulled up the partially-constructed Wynand Building, in a builders' hoist, to join him at its rarefied summit.

The extravagant skyscraper with which *The Fountainhead* ends is an exuberant, Depression-defying gesture, but even Wynand is aware the skyscraper's days are numbered. "'The age of the skyscraper is gone'" he says, ruefully, to Roark: "'This is the age of the housing project'" (724). The enthusiasm of both Le Corbusier and Lloyd Wright is similarly tempered by a growing consciousness of the skyscraper's anachronism. "The skyscraper is bizarre", writes Le Corbusier in *The Radiant City*, and yet "America *bristles* with them" (Le Corbusier 1933: 128). "Is it good, is it wise", he goes on to ask, "to be *bristling* with anything? Is it beautiful to bristle? Is such hirsuteness even mannerly?" Wright also denounces the "exaggerated perpendicularity" of the "arrogant skyscraper" as it casts its masculine shadow over the pedestrians at its feet (Wright 1958: 255-6). Actually, of course, it is the skyscraper's arrogance – its ego-flaunting lack of shame – that recommends it to Rand, but she is keen to demonstrate that there is more to architecture than brazen displays of individualism. Wynand loves the skyscraper because it makes a man standing at its foot "'no bigger than an ant'", but *The Fountainhead* deplores such architectural belittlement (Rand 1943: 518). It frowns on the pride taken by Kiki Holcombe, a vacuous society hostess, in her overblown ballroom:

> She looked up at the twilight of the ceiling, left untouched above the chandeliers, and she noted how far it was above her guests, how dominant and undisturbed. The huge crowd of guests did not dwarf her hall; it stood over them like a square box of space, grotesquely out of scale; and it was this wasted expanse of air imprisoned above them that gave the occasion an aspect of regal

> luxury; it was like the lid of a jewel case, unnecessarily large over a flat bottom holding a single small gem (260).

There is no disputing its impressive hugeness, but rooms should not dwarf their occupants, as skyscrapers should not dwarf pedestrians. The building that stands at the centre of *The Fountainhead* is neither the Holcombe Mansion nor the Wynand Building, but the Stoddard Temple. Designed by Roark, and modestly made of grey limestone:

> Its lines were horizontal, not the lines reaching to heaven, but the lines of the earth. It seemed to spread over the ground like arms outstretched at shoulder-height, palms down, in great, silent acceptance. It did not cling to the soil and did not crouch under the sky. It seemed to lift the earth, and its few vertical shafts pulled the sky down. It was scaled to human height in such a manner that it did not dwarf man, but stood as a setting that made his figure the only absolute, the gauge of perfection by which all dimensions were to be judged. When a man entered this temple, he would feel space molded around him, as if it had waited for his entrance, to be completed (343).

The statue which is the temple's centrepiece is modelled on Dominique, and is a concentrated expression of the "human spirit" that inspires the building – a spirit which, "seeking God and finding itself, show[s] that there is no higher reach beyond its own form" (341). The principle is a humanist one, which is why Toohey despises it. A temple, he avers in his column, should provoke a "'sense of awe and a sense of man's humility'" (360). Its proportions should be titanic, "to impress upon man his essential insignificance, to crush him by sheer magnitude, to imbue him with that sacred terror which leads to the meekness of virtue'". Roark's inclination for a Vitruvian model of temple construction, based on the proportions of the human body, is a sacrilegious snubbing of Victorian monumentalism and, worse, is a threat to the sense of civic humility that enables newspaper men to control the world.

Denounce it as Toohey may, however, Roark's temple is entirely in keeping with modernist architectural thought. In *The Radiant City* Le Corbusier maintains that the only appropriate yardstick for the architect is "the measure of man" (Le Corbusier 1933: 6), and the "Modulor" he develops in *New World of Space* (1948) is an instrument designed specifically to rectify the "loss of human scale that took place in the last century" (Le Corbusier 1948: 124). In "An Organic Architecture" (1939) Wright similarly declares it is time for architecture "again [to] become the most human of all the expressions of human nature" (Wright 1939: 278); and in *Mechanization Takes Command* Giedion's remedy for a damaged epoch includes the recommendation that

"we become human again and let the human scale rule over all our ventures" (Giedion 1948: 723). Roark, in fact, is in full agreement with his peers' directives; the Wynand Building is exceptional in his oeuvre. His houses do not compete with their occupants, nor tower over them. They cradle them, and complement them. "'You can't see yourself here as I do'", says Wynand to Dominique when she moves into the house Roark has designed for them: "'You can't see how completely this house is yours. Every angle, every part of every room is a setting for you. It's scaled to your height, to your body. Even the texture of the walls goes with the texture of your skin'"; and it is not only with Dominique that the house is in tune (Rand 1943: 611). Growing from the surrounding terraced fields as though their "slow rhythm […] had been picked up, stressed, accelerated and broken into the staccato chords of the finale", it exists in seamless harmony with the earth that hosts it, a perfect specimen of the organic architecture Wright prescribes (610). When Roark, early in his career, is asked why he wants to become an architect, he unhesitatingly replies: "'Because I love this earth. That's all I love'" (39). Love, of course, is not all that drives him; Anthony Vidler is not wrong to designate the opening of the novel a "passionate and violent account of the rape of nature by the architect" (Vidler 2001: 52). I suggest, however, that *The Fountainhead* is often unfairly judged by its opening, and by the outrageous virility of its end. It is a novel that is very certain of its priorities: the individual is superior to the mass; solid is superior to fluid; architecture is better than writing; skyscrapers are better than the street, and ornament is unquestionably crime. But, I suggest, Rand's architect-hero is not the finely-honed column of granite for which he has been taken, and nor is her novel a tub-thumping modernist manifesto. The *über*-skyscraper with which the novel ends has distracted attention (as skyscrapers are wont to do) from the buildings at the novel's heart, and Howard Roark's rhetorical mentors are Frank Lloyd Wright and the later Le Corbusier. The skyscraper is a virile symbol of the rationalism, and individualism, that Rand's "objectivist" ideology espouses, and stands as an antidote to the heavily ornamented buildings it deplores, but it is important for the forward-looking architect to let it go. Ultimately (and ironically, as it has from the beginning dismissed writing as architecture's inferior) the novel undermines its own skyscraper; and endorses instead buildings that have been designed on strictly humanist lines.

As for Rand's "ideal man", he is ideal because he lacks the deficiencies of the regular twentieth-century protagonist, whose relationship with everything that lies outside his neurotic subjectivity is so hopelessly disordered. Roark, indeed, enjoys an

enviably easy relationship with the external universe. The "absolute health" of his body distinguishes it from the pudgy, debilitated bodies that absorb too much of the world, and from the frail, brittle-boned bodies that keep too much of it out (Rand 1943: 340). Whether he is soaking in a bath, floating in the sea, or stretched out on a woodland floor, sandy beach or luxury yacht, Roark demonstrates an extraordinary ability to relax. He laughs easily, and his "look of a creature glad to be alive" is reflected in his buildings, which "have one sense above all – a sense of joy" (608, 542). It is the delight of Giedion's tightrope-walking paragon, "the delight produced when the human organism is in perfect health, functioning at its best", the delight of the balanced man, whose inner self is in harmony with his surroundings (Giedion 1948: 720). Rand likes the tightrope image, too. She describes how, early in his career, when still in thrall to the architectural establishment, Roark struggled like "a man walking a tightwire, slow, strained, groping for the only right spot, quivering over an abyss" (Rand 1943: 88). Prevented from acting on his own independent thought, he floundered as others flounder; because "'reality is not within them, but somewhere in that space which divides one human body from another. Not an entity, but a relation – anchored to nothing'" (634). As a mature architect, though, he is centred and bolstered by autonomy, and is to be found tripping lightly through partially constructed buildings, "on shivering planks hung over emptiness, through rooms without ceilings and rooms without floors, to the open edges where girders stuck out like bones through a broken skin" (346). Roark has mended, in his person, the schisms Giedion identified between mind and body, reason and emotion, idealism and reality, man and nature, and achieved a state of exalted equipoise. It is a balanced man Rand is trying to present, far-fetched as he is – an "objectivist" antidote to the existentialist anti-hero.

Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946)

As she walks through the streets of New York, the heroine of Ann Petry's *The Street* listens with satisfaction to the "hard sound of her heels clicking against the sidewalk", and "trie[s] to make it louder" (Petry 1946: 307). "Hard, hard, hard" is the sound of the well-maintained barrier between Lutie Johnson and the external world. Hard is "the only way to be – so hard that nothing, the street, the house, the people, nothing would ever be able to touch her". Lutie's heels, slim frame and implacable resistance to penetration appear to qualify her as literary sister to *The Fountainhead*'s Dominique Francon, and so too does her extreme aversion to streets. But Dominique is a wealthy

white woman. All she needs to do, to defeat a street, is to follow her boyfriend's advice and learn to ignore it. For Lutie, who is black and poor, it is harder to ignore. The street she inhabits is fringed by stores and stands that sell "the leavings, the sweepings, […] the dregs and dross that [are] reserved especially for Harlem" (153). It is peopled in the mornings by black women on their way to work in white women's houses, and in the afternoons by the men they leave behind ("because for years now the white folks haven't liked to give black men jobs that paid enough for them to support their families") to prop up its buildings and ogle the younger women with whom they eventually, inevitably, drift away (388-9). Taking advantage of the resultant parental vacuum, the street then appoints itself first "nursemaid", then "evil father", then "vicious mother" to the "countless children with door keys around their necks" who roam among its overflowing garbage cans (407, 324). While Dominique's perception of what man can achieve is rosily tinted by the elite architects with whom she mixes, to Lutie it seems that man has no power over his destiny. In Harlem it is the street that is in control.

What particularly appals Lutie about her fellow citizens, and chronically sets her apart from them, is their willingness to be moulded by their environment. As though from a distance (although she is, in fact, one of them), she watches the Harlem commuters "surge" onto the subway, and notices how "by elbowing other passengers in the back, by pushing and heaving, they forced their bodies into the coaches, making room for themselves where no room had existed before" (27). She observes, too, that when they arrive at their destinations "the same people who had made themselves small on the train, even on the platform, suddenly grew so large they could hardly get up the stairs to the street together"; and when they get home they adjust their dimensions once again (57-8). While in neighbouring districts white families live in spacious houses at the end of private drives, in Harlem "the black folks were crammed on top of each other – jammed and packed and forced into the smallest possible space until they were completely cut off from light and air" (206). Here, where there are no Corbuserian modulors to ensure architecture conforms to a human scale, space is measured only to maximise the income of white landlords. Lutie's neighbours, though, seem to feel no outrage. Their straightforward response to their overcrowded apartments is to move outside. "Lounging in chairs in front of the houses" and "sleeping on rooftops and fire escapes and park benches", they expand as cheerfully as they did on their release from the subway; and the street, transformed into both living room and "great outdoor

bedroom", obligingly accommodates them (142). Only Lutie stands aloof. As easily nauseated as the protagonists of *Nausea* and *The Fountainhead*, she likes to see boundaries respected. She moved to Harlem to escape both the "riff-raff roomers" with whom her father stuffed his house and the "lush, loose bosom" that persistently spilled through his girlfriend's never-quite-closed housecoat (56, 10). Frowning upon overcrowding and overflow with equal severity, she aspires to a room of her own in which to keep herself to herself. And for that she needs form, limit, and dependable walls.

In *The Street*, though, walls are anything but dependable. Buildings mislead, as they never do in *The Fountainhead*. The Connecticut kitchen that once lured Lutie away from husband and son in pursuit of employment proved to be nothing but "tricks and white enamel", and the "enormous room" which is her local bar quickly shrivels when she notices the huge mirror and concealed lighting that, by "push[ing] the walls back and back into space", have conspired to delude her (56, 146). The trouble with interiors is that they have a depressing tendency to shrink with her hopes. When she first steps over the threshold of the apartment block in 116th Street, her assessment of its dimensions has a delicious, Woolfian uncertainty:

> The low-wattage bulb in the ceiling shed just enough light so that you wouldn't actually fall over – well, a piano that someone had carelessly left at the foot of the stairs; so that you could see the outlines of – oh, possibly an elephant if it were dragged in from the street by some enterprising tenant (6).

Once her eyes have adjusted to the darkness, though, she has to acknowledge that "she was wrong about being able to see an elephant or a piano because the hallway really wasn't wide enough to admit either one"; and, when she crosses the same threshold later in the novel, she is "uneasily conscious of the closeness of the walls" – walls between which the hall that once promised to accommodate elephants is now "only a narrow passageway" (312). While buildings cradle *The Fountainhead*'s Dominique Francon, or else bear her aloft out of the street's mire, they seek only to squash Lutie Johnson – to trap her, suffocate and control her – as a punishment for daring to aspire to privacy.

Presiding over the apartment block, and indeed almost indistinguishable from it, is its superintendent, William Jones. When Lutie knocks on his door to ask him to show her the vacant top-floor apartment, her impression of a "tall, gaunt man" who "towered in the doorway looking at her" is augmented by the long flashlight he holds,

"shiny black – smooth and gleaming faintly as the light lay along its length" (12). In the cramped apartment its beam rests on his feet, and the effect is to elongate him still further, into "a figure of never-ending tallness" that "simply went up and up into darkness" (14-15). Jones is a skyscraper, like Howard Roark, and, "radiat[ing] such desire for her that she could feel it", seems every bit as potent. But Lutie is no pushover, as Heather Hicks points out in an article on surveillance and power in *The Street* (Hicks 2003: 24). She has a torch of her own. It is not Jones's priapic length that terrifies her, actually, but his hunger. In a prolonged nightmare in which he merges with his hellish dog, his nuzzling, pointed face is a dangerous nuisance that pales into insignificance beside his red, ravening, "wolfish" mouth, with its sharp white teeth and relentlessly working throat (Petry 1946: 191). Lutie is much more afraid of being swallowed than penetrated – swallowed by Jones, by his dog, and above all by his building. He seems hell-bent on luring her downstairs to his ground-floor apartment, an infernal space from which "hot fetid air" and a "faint sound of steam hissing in the radiators" emanates as the door closes behind him with "a soft sucking sound" (9, 11). Every time she enters or leaves the building Lutie has to pass this dreadful sucking door, and she is sickeningly aware that down another flight of stairs a further room yawns. Hotter even than his apartment, its door partially open and a furnace at its heart, is the cellar where Jones spends most of his time. It is when she returns late one night, blinded by an offer of a singing job that seems to promise escape from the street, that he catches her off guard. With sweating body and open mouth, he drags her, alternately struggling and frantically clinging to the balustrade, down the stairs towards the expectant cellar door. Whilst rape in *The Fountainhead* is an eagerly anticipated shattering of a burdensome frigidity, in *The Street* it is a monstrous architectural guzzling, overseen by a cannibalistic caretaker.

It would be a mistake, however, to read Jones as a villain in the Toohey mould. There are reasons for his behaviour. It is not just his dog, in Lutie's dream, with which he is fused. Chained to his shoulders "like an enormous doll's house made of brick", its inhabitants "moving around inside [it], drearily climbing the tiny stairs [and] sidling through the narrow halls", is the building in which he lives and works (191). Terribly hampered, Jones haunts the street, begging passers-by to unloose him. The percipience of this dream becomes apparent when the narrative perspective passes to Jones. He remembers how as a young man it "sometimes seemed to him he had been buried alive in the hold" of the ships on which he was employed, and how when he left the sea he

was immediately reincarcerated, by a succession of night watchman jobs, "in the basements and the hallways of vast, empty buildings that were filled with shadows" (86). By the time Lutie moves into the 116th Street apartment block he has been its superintendent for five years, and "knew the cellars and the basements in this street better than he knew the outside of streets just a few blocks away". Constrained to "stay within hailing distance of whatever building he was responsible for", he has become "'cellar crazy'" – a creature of the indoors, hopelessly alienated from the outside world (85, 240).

Jones is not alone. The street, as Lutie discerns, is "full of men like him" (248). Women's work, menial though it is, offers some mobility and opportunity for social interaction. Men on the other hand, when they are employed at all, are employed only to guard and maintain buildings. Shackled to architecture, they become isolated, autistic, and deeply frustrated. In 1947, the year after *The Street* was published, the New York sculptor and artist Louise Bourgeois made a similar comment upon men and architecture. A series of engravings entitled *He Disappeared into Complete Silence* depicts structures that suggest the male body – windowless skyscrapers, water towers, elevator shafts and rooms bare of all furniture but ladders – each of which is accompanied by a story fragment about masculine loneliness, disappointment and failed communication. While for Rand the close association between men and buildings is auspicious, even heroic, for Bourgeois and Petry it is a tragic, pathological attachment that blights human relationships. Avoided by the tenants unless "a roof leaked or a windowpane came out or something went wrong with the plumbing", Jones, like the men in Bourgeois's fables, is "surrounded by silence" (87). To assuage his loneliness he spends his spare time out in the street, leaning against the building, watching, "estimating", "wanting" the women who pass by. Hungry for company, his project is not so much to rape as "to get a woman to stay with him", and the means he uses to achieve it tend to the architectural. Dragging Lutie down to his basement is very much a last resort. He tries to woo her, first, by decorating her flat:

> After he had given her a receipt for the deposit she left on the apartment, he tried to figure out something he could do for her. Something special that would make her like him. He decided to do a special paint job in her apartment – not just that plain white paint she had ordered. So he put green in the living room, yellow in the kitchen, deep rose color in the bedroom, and dark blue in the bathroom. When it was finished, he was very proud of it, for it was the best paint job he'd ever done (100).

Lutie's response ("'What awful colors!'") wounds Jones more deeply than her subsequent sexual rejection, and triggers the anger that transforms her from object of desire to adversary. Having failed to impress her with his caretaking skills, he turns space invader. Lutie's apartment becomes to him "like a magnet whose pull reached down to him and drew him toward it steadily, irresistibly" (232). Finally, one day when she is at work, he inveigles his way in. Penetrating first her bedroom, then her closet, he snuffs at her clothes and captures her lipstick, which he triumphantly keeps in his pocket so that he can "touch it during the day and take it out and fondle it down in the furnace room" (106). This delectably clitoral trophy does not satisfy him for long, however, and in time he brings to his basement a more significant prize. Lutie's son, whom she has struggled so hard to house in the apartment upstairs, is far from happy there. Left alone during the day while she works in an office, and at night while she seeks work as a singer, Bub has fallen victim to the same architectural inconstancy that has so antagonised his mother. In her absence he imagines "that the whole room was changing and shifting about him" (217): "The corners of the room were there, he knew, but he couldn't see them. They were wiped out in the dark. It made him feel as though he were left hanging in space and that he couldn't know how much space there was other than that his body occupied" (215). Familiar items of furniture become menacing and *unheimlich*, as though "quick, darting hands had substituted something else in place of them just as the light went off" (218). The floor creaks, the windows rattle, rats scamper in the wall cavities, and the room "quiver[s]" with the lonely sobbing of a neighbour (215). The basement, to which Bub delivers the mail that Jones tricks him into stealing from the neighbours, offers an alternative space that both excites and nurtures him. The furnace that alarms his mother is, to him, "friendly and warm", and the exposed pipes and pillars reassure him that the building has a stable infrastructure after all (349). Unaware that Lutie is locked in mortal combat with Jones and his basement, Bub concludes that "this great, warm, open space was where he really belonged". Like all males on 116th Street he is, aged eight, already attached to a cellar.

Jones has two other female adversaries, and they both, unlike Lutie, offer an overt challenge to his authority over the building. The first is Mrs Hedges, the brothel keeper who occupies the ground-floor front. It is she that responds when Lutie, having suddenly found her voice during the attempted rape, issues a deafening summons to the building:

> [Lutie] screamed until she could hear her own voice insanely shrieking up the stairs, pausing on the landings, turning the corners, going down the halls, gaining in volume as it started again to climb the stairs. And then her screams rushed back down the stair well until the whole building echoed and re-echoed with the frantic, desperate sound (236).

When she emerges from her apartment, Mrs Hedges's appearance is "awe-inspiring" (237). Bald, terribly scarred by a house fire from which she narrowly escaped, and clad in discarded men's shoes and a loose cotton dress which has a "clumsy look – bulky and wrinkled", she fills the entrance hall like the elephant Lutie once imagined could be housed there (5). Jones may be tall, but he is no match for this "mountain of a woman", who rescues Lutie from the basement's jaws with "powerful hands" that "thrust [him] hard against the cellar door" and wrench her from his grasp (236). Enraged but helpless, Jones has to concede that Mrs Hedges is queen of the hallway, and worries that her power may extend beyond it. Whenever he is out on the street he is uncomfortably conscious that she is stationed at her open window "like she'd been glued to it", looking out for potential prostitutes and customers (288). Her eyes, "cold and unfriendly as the eyes of a snake", fill him "with a vast uneasiness, for he was certain that she could read his thoughts", as he too ogles the passing women (106, 89). And if Jones tries retreating to his apartment to escape her gaze, he finds himself face to face with his other enemy, Min, the only woman he has managed to persuade to "stay with him" (94). Min has, indeed, stayed two years, and has outstayed her welcome. Jones compares her "shapeless" body with Lutie's well-defined one, her timidity with Lutie's feistiness, and the "slapping, scuffing sound" of her "worn felt slippers" with Lutie's "high heels clicking on the stairs", and finds them wanting (284). When she first moved in it seemed "kind of cheerful to have her around" (98). Now, however, she has become an obstacle between himself and a woman who is, he is certain, "not the kind of girl who would have anything to do with a man who had a wreck of a woman attached to him" (233). Unaware that Lutie has actually diagnosed his problem as an unhealthy attachment to the building, rather than to his cohabitee, he listens to Min's sloppy slippers and, "realis[ing] he hated her", embarks on a single-minded campaign to "put her out" (95).

Min, however, is equally "dead set on not being put out" (129). Jones's offer of a rent-free home has given her a "secure, happy feeling" which, after a lifetime of evictions, she is reluctant to relinquish (117). Evie Shockley, I suggest, is mistaken to read her eagerness to avoid paying rent as abject economic dependence (Shockley 2006:

451). Min is a woman of means. She has a table, which was given to her by one of the white women for whom she worked as a domestic. Ornate and gleaming, this piece of furniture gives her a certain status, and is a mark of her legitimate occupancy of Jones's apartment. Its principal virtue, though, is a concealed drawer in which she has for years been secreting any money she has earned or found. Faced with the current emergency (Jones's trips to the top floor have not gone unnoticed), she resolves to shelve her plans for a new set of false teeth, and to fund her anti-eviction offensive by raiding the table. Jones, who returns from the top floor full of plans "to throw Min out so hard she would walk on the other side of the street when she passed this house", is wrong-footed by her unprecedented absence (Petry 1946: 110). He has, it seems, underestimated her potency. The table has given her the mobility he lacks and, in an astonishing burst of proactivity, she has gone out to consult a root doctor.

Prophet David's influence over human desire is limited, as he warns Min, but he is able to draw on a combination of Christianity and conjure substantially to enhance her power over space. She returns to the disputed apartment with a powder to sprinkle on the floor, a crucifix to hang over the bed, and a new regime of daily cleaning. There is an immediate shift in the balance of power – a shift that Jones, who has been walled up in silence for so long that he is hypersensitive to sound, perceives principally through his hearing. Min, who normally inserts her key in the lock with timid uncertainty before "st[anding] there for a second as though overwhelmed by the sound it made", this time inserts it "with an offensive, decisive loudness" and, once inside, slams the door "with a bang that echoed through the apartment and in the hall outside, and could even be heard going faintly up the stairs" (138-9). She gets noisier and noisier, indeed, as her power increases. Words habitually whispered are now voiced, "well[ing] up in her, overflow[ing] and fill[ing] the kitchen"; the bedroom is "filled with the sound" of her snore, and in the living room she sets the table with a "slam-bang of plates and a furious rattling of knives and forks" that flood the apartment "with noise, with confusion, with swift, angry movement" (295, 232, 326). The crucifix, meanwhile, protects her from any retaliation on Jones's part. His professed atheism is completely overwhelmed by a fear of a symbol that is "mixed up in his mind with the evil spirits and the powers of darkness it could invoke against those who outraged the laws of the church" – presumably by leering at women on street corners (140). The dreadful cross first banishes him from the bedroom, then infects the whole apartment. He sees "a suggestion of its outline" wherever he looks: "in the window panes, in chairs, in the

bars on the canary's cage", and even on Min's "shapeless, flabby body" (231). Min, who is busily "scrubbing and cleaning the apartment just as though it were hers", now occupies it as incontestably as Mrs Hedges occupies the hallway (293). And Jones, thoroughly emasculated, is exiled to his cellar.

Driven out of his apartment by one woman's noise, Jones is haunted and baffled by the noise of another. The howl with which Lutie "filled the hall" as she fought him off still rings in his ears (282). Struggling to find a motive for her strident resistance, he concludes she is in love with Junto, the white landlord. In fact, though, there is nothing more disgusting to Lutie than a white man. *The Street*, indeed, is suffused with racial disgust. Miss Rinner, Bub's white teacher, is tortured by the "peculiarly offensive odor" she imagines emanating from the black children in her care – an odour she identifies as "the smell of Harlem itself – bold, strong, lusty, frightening" (327). As pernicious as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "yellow" smell, it "assault[s]" her while she eats her lunch, "lurk[s]" in the subway station, "pervade[s]" her apartment, and intensifies in the classroom over the weekend "as though it were a living thing that had spawned […] and in reproducing itself had now grown so powerful it could be seen as well as smelt" (328). Everywhere she looks Miss Rinner sees worrying symptoms of a black leakage into a white world. Black teenagers "ma[k]e passionate love on the very doorsteps" as she walks home through Harlem, while their parents lounge on discarded furniture "as though they were in their living rooms" (an overflow, of course, of which Lutie also disapproves); and, in the classroom, a morbid fear of "having to witness one of the many and varied functions of the human body" (a boy urinating) continually displaces her more pleasant daydreams of a transfer to a school where "blond, blue-eyed little girls […] arrive on time in the morning filled with orange juice, cereal and cream, properly cooked eggs, and tall glasses of milk" – all nicely contained, no doubt, in reliably non-porous bodies (332, 334-6, 329). Lutie, meanwhile, is no less revolted by white people. Mr Crosse, for whose singing school she auditions, is "so saturated with the smell of tobacco that it seeped from his skin" – skin which is "the color of the underside of a fish – grayish white" (321). "'This is the superior race'", Lutie reminds herself disdainfully as she stands before him: "'Take a good long look at him: black, oily hair; slack, gross body; grease spots on his vest; wrinkled shirt collar; cigar ashes on his suit; small pig eyes engulfed in the fat of his face'" (322). While Miss Rinner's racism manifests itself in a phobic shrinking from black bodily fluids, Lutie's is remarkable for its failure to acknowledge anything lying beneath fat white skins. Dark

skins are beautiful to her – "smooth to the touch" and "warm from the blood that ran through the veins under the skin" (71). She loves to feel her own blood "bubbling all through her body", and remembers how she "cringed away" in distress from the "bright red blood" shed by a young black girl knifed in a street brawl (60, 205). Blood is strikingly missing, however, from her memory of the suicide she witnessed while working for a wealthy white family in Connecticut. Jonathan Chandler shot himself one Christmas morning, inches from the Christmas tree, in front of Lutie, the child she was employed to look after, and the child's parents. Lutie remembers the family's response: its embarrassment, its brandy consumption, its neglect of the child, and its whitewashing of the incident into an "'accident with a gun'" (49). But the blood that must have drenched tree, room and inmates is entirely absent from her narrative. White people are bloodless creatures, as far as Lutie is concerned. They have no insides.

It is with the white race, nevertheless, that the power lies. Lutie, whose Puritan grandmother brought her up to believe that "if Ben Franklin could live on a little bit of money and could prosper, so could she", has been forced to confront the reality that while Franklin lived "in Philadelphia a pretty long number of years ago", she lives in Harlem, and "from the time she was born she had been hemmed into an ever-narrowing space, until now she was very nearly walled in and the wall had been built up brick by brick by eager white hands" (64, 323-4). James Truslow Adams's American Dream, where men and women develop "unhampered by the barriers […] slowly erected in the older civilizations", has been appropriated by whites, and they have sought every opportunity to block black access (Adams 1931: 405). Lutie's bitter verdict on life is that "in every direction, anywhere one turned, there was always the implacable figure of a white man blocking the way" (Petry 1946: 315). When the "formless, shapeless, […] fluid moving mass" that increasingly dogs her imagination finally resolves itself into the grey, squat, stomach-turning figure of Junto, her "accumulated hate and […] accumulated anger" focuses itself into one thought: "'I would like to kill him'" (418, 422). In the event, though, it is not Junto that she bludgeons to death, but his black henchman.

Boots Smith's early working life was not dissimilar to Jones's. Where Jones was "buried alive" in ships' holds, however, Boots was entombed in Pullman sleeping cars; and where Jones was "surrounded by silence" Boots was beleaguered by sound:

> The train roaring into the night. Coaches rocking and swaying. A bell that rang and rang and rang, and refused to stop ringing. A bell that stabbed into your

> sleep at midnight, at one, at two, at three, at four in the morning. Because slack-faced white women wanted another blanket, because gross white men with skins the red of boiled lobster couldn't sleep because of the snoring of someone across the aisle (264).

The white man's high-handed occupation of space has remained, for Boots, a constant irritant. Haunted by the Pullman cars, he is also maddened by memories of his unexpected entry into a room "full of arrested motion", in which a curtain fluttered in the breeze while his wife's white lover made a nonchalant exit down a fire escape (268). He evaded the draft, he says, because Germany is "'only doing the same thing in Europe that's been done in this country since the time it started" – the thing that means he cannot walk into a diner "'because any white bastard in there will let me know one way or another that niggers belong in Harlem'" (260). His "hate for white folks" burns as fiercely as Lutie's (259). Unlike hers, though, it impels him to abandon his principles. In Junto's employment he becomes the novel's only successful black man, exploiting Harlem to escape from it into an opulent apartment house with potted shrubs, soft carpets, mirrored walls, uniformed doormen and gleaming elevators. He makes a costly mistake, though, when he underestimates Lutie. Deciding whether or not to protect her from Junto is, for him, a simple matter of measuring her exchange value:

> Balance Lutie Johnson. Weigh Lutie Johnson. Long legs and warm mouth. Soft skin and pointed breasts. Straight slim back and small waist. Mouth that curves over white, white teeth. Not enough. She didn't weigh enough when she was balanced against a life of saying 'yes sir' to every white bastard who had the price of a Pullman ticket […] Not enough. One hundred Lutie Johnsons didn't weigh enough (265).

Actually, however, Lutie is more than the sum of her feminine parts. Her "accumulated" hatred and anger lend her a heftiness that Boots's careful calculations have quite failed to take into account. His rape attempt is a sexual interception between Lutie and Junto, and is intended as a retaliatory assault on the white world; but its effect on Lutie is to swell her own "deepening stream of rage" (428). She is capable of anything, and Boots has made himself fatally vulnerable by placing himself between her and her white oppressor:

> […] she couldn't stop shouting, and shouting wasn't enough. She wanted to hit out at him, to reduce him to a speechless mass of flesh, to destroy him completely, because he was there in front of her and she could get at him and in getting at him she would find violent outlet for the full sweep of her wrath.

Boots's death bears no resemblance to Jonathan Chandler's anaemic suicide.

> She grew angrier as she struck him, because he seemed to be eluding her behind a red haze that obscured his face. Then the haze of red blocked his face out completely. She lowered her arm, peering at him, trying to locate his face through the redness that concealed it (431).

It is the death of a black man, and is, therefore, soaked in blood.

In 1949 James Baldwin reproached the black protest novel for its sensationalism, arguing that that the "hatred [that] smoulders through [its] pages like sulphur fire" poorly masks the reality that it is as "trapped and immobilised in the sunlit prison of the American Dream" as films such as *The Best Years of our Lives* or the fiction of Harriet Beecher Stowe (Baldwin 1949: 91-2). In 1951 he repeated the accusation, maintaining that Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, together with "all his furious kin", serve "only to whet the notorious national taste for the sensational" (Baldwin 1951: 102). It is a charge of which *The Street*, I would argue, should be acquitted. Lutie would doubtless be the first to claim furious kinship with Bigger, but Petry is careful to keep her heroine at a distance. The hatred that smoulders through *The Street*'s pages is Lutie's, not Petry's, and Lutie's judgement is shown to be clouded by prejudice. Her youthful pursuit of the American success myth is discredited, and so too is the intransigent determinism with which she replaces it. The street, in *The Street*, is not actually such a bad place to be. For Bub it beats the "clammy silence" that pervades his apartment, and Jones loves its "fresh […] clean air" (Petry 1946: 350, 373). There are several occasions when its "grime", "garbage" and "ugliness" are "gently obscured" by a "delicate film" of snow, and even Lutie has to acknowledge it looks good bathed in sunlight (436):

> She […] walked along slowly, thinking that the sun transformed everything it shone on. So that people standing talking in front of the buildings, the pushcart men in the side streets, the peanut vendor, the sweet potato man, all had an unexpected graciousness in their faces and their postures. Even the drab brick of the buildings was altered to a deep rosy pinkness (195).

Lutie is not one for rosy glow, of course, and makes no use of her glimpse of the street in its positive aspect. Other characters, though, are more willing to adapt. In Wright's *Native Son* we are (in Baldwin's words) "limited to Bigger's perceptions", and thus deprived of a sense of "the relationship that Negroes bear to one another" and of "the shared experience which creates a way of life" (Baldwin 1951: 102). Petry, on the other hand, offers us alternative stories that allow her to steer clear of a sensational wallowing in murder and failure. There are characters in *The Street* who dispense with Lutie's

proud insularity, and achieve a small measure of success by participating in the community, and making their peace with their surroundings.

I remarked above on the relative mobility of *The Street*'s female characters. It was not easily won. It took a Herculean effort, for example, for Mrs Hedges to achieve her youthful escape from a burning apartment block. The tiny window through which she forced her elephantine bulk stripped her of her clothes, skin and hair, but still she continued to push – hard enough to "make the very stones of the foundation give" – until the building had no choice but to let her go (Petry 1946: 244). She has separated herself from the apartment block (unlike the unhappy Jones) and, in so doing, has earned its respect. It rewards her for challenging it, by putting her in charge of its corridors and entrances. Jones, meanwhile, his superintendency thoroughly compromised, is deeply suspicious of the Hedges/architecture alliance, and particularly resents her relationship with the window. Lutie dislikes it too. Having Mrs Hedges as a neighbour is "like living in a tent with everything that goes on inside it open to the world because the flap won't close", and is a chronic threat to her privacy (68). For the community, though, Mrs Hedges and her window perform a valuable role. As Jane Jacobs was to point out in her influential indictment of twentieth-century urban planning *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), windows ensure that "eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street are properly trained on it, equipping it to safeguard both residents and strangers" (Jacobs 1961: 45). Mrs Hedges, I suggest, is just such a natural proprietor. Far from passively watching "the brawling, teeming, lusty life that roared past her window", she advises people through it, admonishes them, warns them and even rescues them (Petry 1946: 251). Her surveillance, participative and benevolent, allows her to discriminate both between streets and between their inhabitants – something that Lutie chronically fails to do. To Lutie all streets are the same – crowded but desolate, filthy, dangerous, "vicious" and "filled with violence" – and people are equally indistinguishable (425, 200). When she batters Boots to death she is "scarcely aware of him as an individual" (429). He is but a "handy, anonymous figure", a "thing on a sofa", a "piece of that dirty street itself" whose "name might have been Brown or Smith or Wilson" (429, 422, 431). Her rage has warped her ability to differentiate, and as a consequence the street has become a monstrous monolith in which everything is subsumed. Mrs Hedges's close observation, on the other hand, has led her to the opposite conclusion. To her 116th Street is "slightly

different from any other place" (251). It has its own identity, of which she speaks with a lover's bias:

> When she referred to it as 'the street' her lips seemed to linger over the words as though her mind paused at the sound to write capital letters and then enclosed the words in quotation marks – thus setting it off and separating it from any other street in the city, giving it an identity, unmistakable and apart (251-2).

She rebukes Lutie for her prejudice ("'Folks differs, dearie. They differ a lot'"), and tries to show her that it is perfectly possible to live comfortably in Harlem (240). Her apartment has "bright linoleum on the floor", "kitchen curtains […] freshly done up", "pots and pans […] scrubbed until they were shiny" and "potted plants growing in a stand under the window" (118-19). Her prostitution business, as Rosemarie Garland Thomson observes in her analysis of Mrs Hedges as physically disabled female subject, is more of an "adaptation to brutal adversity" than an exploitation of it – an acclimatisation, that allows Mrs Hedges and her girls to "make a life for themselves mostly on their own terms, choosing their customers, tending the sick, watching kids after school, and looking out for one another" (Thomson 1995: 612). And her relationship with Junto, both professional and personal, is a good one, based on mutual respect. What Mrs Hedges does so well, and it is a skill that Lutie obdurately refuses to master, is make contacts.

Min, too, has developed some successful strategies for managing her environment. It was Carol Henderson who first brought Min out of the shadows, and identified her as Lutie's foil. Until then critics had been misled by Lutie's disdainful assessment of her as "a drab drudge so spineless and so limp she was like a soggy dishrag" (Petry 1946: 57). Min *would* seem soggy, of course, to one so doggedly convinced that "hard is the only way to be". The reason she is overlooked by the novel's heroine and critics, as Henderson points out, is her quiet resistance to the allure of the American Dream (Henderson 2000: 854). Her strong survival instinct leads her to adapt to her environment, rather than to fight it, or outwit it. She knows when to be a peacock – her "varnishy-shiny" table with its ostentatiously carved feet raises her status among the neighbours, attracts husbands and wards off homelessness – but she is also an accomplished chameleon (Petry 1946: 369). Her dress is "the exact shade of the dark brown of the upholstery" of the chair she has brought with her to Jones's apartment, and when she sits in it she vanishes so completely that Lutie is at first unaware of her presence (23). To Lutie, herself always so sharply outlined, it seems extraordinary that

anyone could "sit in a chair and melt into it like that". It is not that Lutie does not understand furniture's monetary value – the first thing she does when she enters the home of someone richer than herself is "tak[e] an inventory of the room" – but she does not share Min's affinity with it (399). It constantly trips her up and bruises her knees, and it seems to swell at night to fill her shrinking apartment. Min is canny with her furniture, like Arabella Donn in *Jude the Obscure*; but for Lutie, like Jude and Sue, it remains always a troublesome impediment.

It is because she makes such an enemy of the external world, I suggest, that Lutie is not one of the century's survivors. Her resolve that, having "come this far poor and black and shut out as though a door had been slammed in her face", she will "beat and bang" on the door, "push against it" and "use a chisel in order to get it open" does her credit; but actually her efforts prove as unproductive as Jude Fawley's hopeless hammering at the walls of Christminster (186). It is Min who gets round closed doors, and she does so without resorting to chisels. Min is willing to form alliances, like Arabella Donn, both with the material world and with her fellow man. Vilbert the quack seems to Arabella as good a man as any to replace her dying husband at the end of *Jude* (Hardy 1896: 487), and at the end of *The Street* Min similarly decides that the strong-armed pushcart man she hires to move her furniture from Jones's apartment will satisfactorily fill the bed that now stretches "vast and empty around all sides of her" (Petry 1946: 353). Her philosophy that "a woman by herself [doesn't] stand much chance" has led her to make connections that prove infinitely more effective than Lutie's obdurate individualism (133). Lutie's refusal to participate in the "ebb and flow of talk and laughter" that animates the Harlem street has sealed her tightly in her privacy, but also cut her off from communal support (415). Petry's position, apparently the antithesis of Rand's, is encapsulated in her spirited response to Baldwin's objections to the social protest novel: "Man *is* his brother's keeper" (Petry 1950: 96). The way to survive the twentieth-century street is not to fight it, but to collaborate with it.

Zarathustra's *Übermensch* ("the Superman", as translated by Reginald Hollingdale) is clearly the model for Rand's "ideal man". Rand believes, with Nietzsche's prophet, that the "grinning mouths and the thirst of the unclean" are slowly poisoning the "fountain of delight", and Roark is the fountainhead that will impose discipline, and cleanse life of its rabble taint (Nietzsche 1883: 120). The Superman is no deity, though, as Zarathustra is at pains to point out. His role – "true to the earth" rather than "superterrestrial" – is that of Giedion's tightrope walker: to reunite body

with soul, and both with world (42). And Rand, too, is keen to keep her hero grounded. Roark shows, by example, that the fanatical shield erected by Dominique to protect herself from both crowd and world is both unnecessary and unwise; and it is not so much "the mass" Rand wants him to control, as extrinsic values. As left-wing activist, anti-racism campaigner, and women's editor of the Marxist-Leninist weekly newspaper *People's Voice* (1942-48), Petry's political stance could not be more different from that of her contemporary; and Mrs Hedges and Min could hardly be described as *Übermenschen*. It is in their survival methods, I suggest, that they resemble Roark. Like him, they adopt a strategy of *letting the world in* – at any rate (as Roark puts it), "down to a certain point". While Lutie's fear of formlessness, and Jones's morbid attachment to his cellar, chronically impel them to accommodate themselves to the structures that continue to crush them, Petry's minor characters survive by quietly subverting those same structures – not by demolishing or dismantling them, but by working with them, adapting to them, keeping them onside. Ultimately, in *The Street*, as in so many other works of twentieth-century fiction, participation is shown to prevail over retreat.

4.

"Solitaire ou Solidaire": Inside, or Outside, the Whale

The first three chapters of this thesis presented a range of texts to support the contention that twentieth-century fiction is peculiarly preoccupied with architecture – with rooms and their contents; windows and doors; walls, and their structural flaws and surface blemishes – and that the reason for this preoccupation is that writers saw architecture as an ideal figure through which to explore the implications of changes in the conceptual categories of "inside" and "outside", "being" and "world". In *The Culture of Time and Space* (1983), his survey of the cultural effects of technological change between 1880 and World War I, Stephen Kern lists some of the apparently inviolable structures with which the traditional world had been held together:

> Everything had a separate nature, a correct place, and a proper function, as the entire world was ordered in discrete and mutually exclusive forms: solid/porous, opaque/transparent, inside/outside, public/private, city/country, noble/common, countryman/foreigner, framed/open, actor/audience, ego/object, and space/time. These old scaffoldings had supported the way of life and culture of the Western world for so long that no one could recall exactly how they all started or why they were still there (Kern 1983: 209-10).

Modern innovations such as mass-produced glass, radio, the telephone exchange, and systems for the transmission of electricity and gas, meant that inside and outside could no longer be seen to be "securely and unambiguously divided by solid walls"; and skin, too, was compromised, as x-ray illuminated the human skeleton and threatened to betray "the secrets of the heart" (209). It was the increasing impotence of physical boundaries, according to Kern, that excited artists of the early twentieth century. It offered figurative opportunities for expressing what they saw as a corresponding loosening of metaphysical boundaries between self, other and world. This chapter will argue that for later twentieth-century writers, too, the wall – the form in which dualism is both actualised and expressed – continued to be a symbol through which to explore the "/" that divides Kern's opposing terms; and that another world war, an escalating nuclear threat, globalisation, and the development of the worldwide web, rendered it less and less robust as the century progressed.

The first part of this chapter will focus on two post-war texts that return to the question posed in the second chapter of the thesis: whether man is justified in walling himself up, or whether he ought, under the circumstances, to be mingling in the world.

Man's instinct, always, is to set limits upon himself. His survival depends upon it, after all, as the narrator of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pnin* (1957) observes when the eponymous protagonist experiences an attack of Sartrean existential nausea: "One of the main characteristics of life is discreteness. Unless a film of flesh envelops us, we die. Man exists only insofar as he is separated from his surroundings. The cranium is a space-traveller's helmet. Stay inside or you perish" (Nabokov 1957: 17). The protagonists of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1949), set in London during the Second World War, are classified according to their tendency to merge or withdraw. While some welcome the chaotic mingling of inside and outside that results from a blitz-enforced reduction of architectural potency, others yearn for enclosure, and strive to be admitted indoors. While some lust after transparency, others hide secrets behind diligently lowered blackout blinds. Walls offer a promising second line of defence, when the "film of flesh" is under threat from outside. The room is a lair. It structures being, and also, as Virginia Woolf demonstrates in "The Mark on the Wall", facilitates thought. Woolf does not allow her narrator to muse forever in her room, however, as was pointed out in the second chapter of this thesis; and Albert Camus's "Jonas" (1957), the second text examined in this chapter, issues a similar ethical challenge to the poetics of retreat. An agoraphobic tendency is to be forgiven when "tomorrow the world may burst into fragments" as, post-Hiroshima, Camus feared it might (Camus, "The Wager of Our Generation" 1957: 170), and it may be that the artist has a particular duty to "tear himself away in order to consider the misfortune and give it form" (Camus, "The Artist and his Time" 1957: 169). The question for Camus, though, is whether he has a conflicting responsibility, to *share* in the misfortune; and it is this that he addresses in "Jonas". The parable will be placed in the context of writing by George Orwell, Cyril Connolly, Hannah Arendt, and Camus himself, to argue that it is engaging with a heated contemporary debate about the ethics of withdrawal.

This chapter will continue to identify the century's fictional survivors – those nimble funambulists who avoid the phobias of their contemporaries, and maintain their balance with such ease – and to examine their relationship with architecture. It will test the hypothesis that an explanation for their equipoise may be found in their acceptance of a reduction in architectural potency – a relaxation, in other words, of structure. "'It's funny about the war; the way everything is one side or the other'", observes one of the characters in *The Heat of the Day*; but it is precisely this point, I will argue, that the novel seeks to interrogate (Bowen 1949: 31). Its wartime setting allows Bowen to test

the strength of boundaries that have hitherto seemed unassailable. The inside/outside dichotomy is very obviously compromised, when walls have been so literally fractured; but so too are other, less material polarities – between past and present, presence and absence, living and dead, self and other, and even (paradoxically, in the context of war) between friend and enemy. Robert Venturi's "gentle manifesto" for postmodernist architecture sets out his preference for the "both-and" over the "either-or"; and the "black and white, and sometimes gray", over the "black or white"; and it may be that, as literary modernism gives way to postmodernism, fictional architecture, like its literal counterpart, will be expected to relinquish binarism (Venturi 1966: 16). The chapter will begin to consider whether writers consider architecture capable of such a feat.

It was its solid objectivist credentials that prompted Ayn Rand to choose architecture as the backdrop for *The Fountainhead*. Its no-nonsense espousal of dualism distinguishes it sharply from her own discipline, as she depicts it in her novel. Writing is second-rate, for Rand, because it is ill-disciplined, and as uncontainable as the water so many of her characters fear. In post-war fiction the rivalry between architecture and writing continued to be an issue. In Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* (1953), for example, the eponymous protagonist, like Rand's characters, finds architecture the more dependable discipline. It frames his being, and seems to offer some respite from language's importunate, but unproductive demands:

> Help, help, if I could only describe this place, I who am so good at describing places, walls, ceilings, floors, they are my speciality, doors, windows […] if I could put myself in a room, that would be the end of the wordy-gurdy, even doorless, even windowless, nothing but the four surfaces, the six surfaces, if I could shut myself up, it would be mine, it could be black dark, I could be motionless and fixed, I'd find a way to explore it, I'd listen to the echo, I'd get to know it, I'd get to remember it, I'd be home, I'd say what it's like, in my home, instead of any old thing, this place, if I could describe this place, portray it, I've tried, I feel no place, no place round me, there's no end to me, I don't know what it is, it isn't flesh, it doesn't end, it's like air […] like gas, balls, balls, the place, then we'll see, first the place, then I'll find me in it, I'll put me in it, a solid lump, in the middle, or in a corner, well propped up on three sides … (Beckett 1953: 392).

Ultimately, however, the unnameable decides that architecture can only ever be somewhere to put oneself. He is "still in it" at the novel's conclusion, but it is too structure-bound to "bring an end to the wordy-gurdy", or, indeed, to existence, with which language is inextricably entangled:

> …all words, there's nothing else, you must go on, that's all I know […] it will be I, you must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say

> words, as long as there are any, until they find me […] it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on (407).

Whether architecture or art (and, in particular, writing) has the capacity to make human existence more bearable is a question that features in "Jonas", too, and it is a question that will recur, as I will demonstrate, in late twentieth-century fiction. Writing shows a versatility, an elasticity, a complexity, and a willingness to embrace contradiction, that architecture, perhaps, may not be up to emulating.

The second part of the chapter will identify another survivor, and explore his relationship with architecture, while also returning to topics raised earlier in the thesis: the house as field of marital battle, the house as container of subjectivity, and the wall as surface to be read. The narrator of Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (1957) is not, at first sight, a strong candidate for survival. A claustrophobe of the first order, his focus is entirely internal. He has no interest in participating in the world beyond his bungalow, and is, like the narrator of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (with which I will compare the novel) an incorrigible over-reader. And yet, I will argue, he *is* a survivor, and it is by forming an alliance with architecture, while simultaneously using it for his own purposes, that he survives. The *jalousie*, or shuttered blind, allows him to command the middle ground between inside and outside, open and closed, visible and invisible; to subvert his wife's control over architecture and its decoration; and finally to create an alternative narrative by slipping between the novel's sliced scenes.

The chapter will call on canonical twentieth-century works that concern themselves with dichotomy and its collapse – Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* (1957) and Jacques Derrida's "The Double Session" (1970) – to support the argument that, as the century progressed, writers were increasingly intrigued by the potential of their own discipline to undermine architecture, and challenge its authority.

Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1949)

In June 1940 Virginia Woolf anxiously noted in her diary that the Second World War had "taken away the outer wall of security. No echo comes back. I have no surroundings" (Woolf 1936-41: 299). On the other hand, though, there was something

stimulating, for writers, in the blitz. For Hilda "H.D." Doolittle, an American poet who lived in London for the duration of the war, artistic inspiration was a breath of fresh air, as well as a prowler lurking among the city's ruined buildings:

> ruin everywhere, yet as the fallen roof
> leaves the sealed room
> open to the air,
>
> so, through our desolation,
> thoughts stir, inspiration stalks us
> through gloom" (H.D. 1944: 3).

In her postscript to the American edition of *The Demon Lover* (1946) Elizabeth Bowen described the dramatic effect on the psyche of the "violent destruction of solid things" as an "explosion of the illusion that prestige, power and permanence attach to bulk and weight" (Lee 1986: 95). The collapse of London's walls shattered the credibility of established oppositions between public and private, and with boundaries so severely compromised it was impossible to maintain a robust sense of identity. "Differentiation was suspended", she wrote, so that "sometimes I hardly knew where I stopped and everyone else began". In *The Heat of the Day* the human response to architectural impotence is ambivalent. While those unaffected by the bombing go out of their way to visit the "unreverberating lacunae" that appear overnight between buildings, more attracted than alarmed by the echolessness Woolf describes, those who have been rendered homeless retrace their steps "with the obstinacy of animals" in search of "what was no longer there"; then set up camp in "rooms of draughty dismantled houses or corners of fled-from flats" (Bowen 1949: 291, 91, 94). There they quickly adapt to a "fluid", "easy" existence in the "canvas-like impermanence of their settings", proving that it is perfectly possible to dwell, albeit dilutedly, in a home that lacks a roof and all four of its walls (94).

Stella Rodney, the novel's heroine, is a member of this vagrant community. Her "footloose habits of living" are precipitated partly by the blitz, and partly by a divorce which is itself a symptom of the unsettled times (313). Having tried out a "succession of little houses", the borrowed flat in which she finally comes to an uneasy rest does not, in the opinion of her son Roderick, "look like home" (47). Its furniture, certainly, fails to root her to it – principally because none of it belongs to her. The sofa, which looks as though "it might have been some derelict piece of furniture exposed on a pavement after an air raid or washed up by a flood on some unknown shore", seems not

to care whether it lives inside or out, and the kitchen is no more comfortable (55). Its fitted space-saving conveniences have made of it a "glazed, surgical-looking cabinet" which Stella eschews throughout the novel in favour of a series of restaurants, grills and bars. It is in one of these ("a bar or club – afterwards they could never remember which") that she and Robert Kelway meet for the first time, and are immediately interrupted by a bomb that falls on a neighbouring bar (95). In the "cataracting roar of a split building" their first words are completely drowned (96). It is the "demolition of an entire moment", and in the ensuing fissure all the normal, exploratory questions of a first meeting are left unasked. For neither, it has to be said, is this enforced reticence a barrier to a relationship. Both work in intelligence, and the "flash of promise" each sees in the other's face derives from the "background of mystery" that seems to lurk there (95). When Robert later recalls how "'your mothy way of blinking and laziness about keeping your eyelids open didn't so much attract me when we first met as reassure me'" he intends it as a compliment, and he becomes, for her, "a habitat" outside which "lies the junk-yard of what does not matter" (90, 119, 99). For two years they make of Stella's flat "a hermetic world" (90) like the "solid vault without a single window" which is the Wynands' windowless penthouse (Rand 1943: 501), in which the silence that stands "storeys deep in the empty house below them" easily compensates for its inhospitable furniture (Bowen 1949: 100). When Stella draws down her blackout blind, "every crack was stopped" so that "not a mote of darkness could enter" (56). "Sealed up in its artificial light", the flat becomes "exaggerated and cerebral", hyper-internal, a space of total withdrawal from a dangerous public realm.

Actually, though, Robert's instinct for retreat predates the war, and is a response not to blitz, but to a monstrous childhood home. Holme Dene, identified by Neil Corcoran as "one of the most heavily moralised houses in Elizabeth Bowen", is weighed down with interiority (Corcoran 2004: 175-6). An effect of "concentrated indoorness" is achieved by sound-proofed walls that are "flock-packed with matter – repressions, doubts, fears, subterfuges and fibs" and by massive, light-deadening mahogany furniture and draught-excluding screens (Bowen 1949: 256, 108). Curtains are kept jealously drawn to protect archways and windows from the eyes of potential house buyers, and vulnerable squints in walls are covered with "what looked like eye-patches of black cotton" (251-2). "'This is England'", Robert's sister explains to Stella: "One expects to have privacy'" (254). For Holme Dene's inhabitants, however, there is

actually no privacy. Robert's sister and mother have "eyes like gimlets", and run a relentlessly efficient, panoptical surveillance system in which all mail is perused, "'hiding'" is forbidden, and the "sort of playful circumlocution" of the twisting upstairs corridors renders it impossible to see without first being seen (112, 256-7). A strategically placed chair ensures Mrs Kelway has a commanding view from the living-room windows despite their draperies, and no-one can leave the house unchallenged. It would be a mistake to assume Robert's oppressors are all female, however, "man-eating house" though Holme Dene undoubtedly is (257). Mrs Kelway and her daughter have extraordinarily penetrative eyes, but it is the eyes of his father, now dead, that have caused Robert the most damage. He tells Stella how Mr Kelway's insistence that the two of them "'perpetually look[…] each other in the eye'" led to "'convulsions of awkwardness when we literally couldn't unlock our looks'", and how as a result he became so well acquainted with his father's eye that he is still able to "'draw a map […] of every vein in his iris'", and has a lasting horror of "'the jelly of an eye'" (119). Small wonder, then, that he is attracted by Stella's "mothy" failure to meet his gaze; and small wonder, too, that as an adolescent he took to photography. An ideal hobby for one so desperate to escape his kindred's stare, it secured him a dark room with a "door he could respectably lock" – a hideout that was an early prototype of Stella's blacked out flat (257).

Robert Harrison, the counterspy with Robert Kelway in his sights, has "'inside' power" that gives him access to sealed spaces (128). London's wartime anonymity is no barrier to him, as he demonstrates early in the novel by finding Stella's flat, apparently without knowing her address. Slipping through her door "with all the unobtrusive celerity of a normally outdoor dog", he "posts" himself on her hearthrug and "look[s] about him like a German in Paris" (128, 220, 44). Domestic space, for Harrison, is space to be occupied. The bargain he tries to strike with Stella (that if she agrees to sleep with him he will turn a blind eye to Robert's treachery) is driven more by envy of Robert's place in her flat than his place in her heart or bed. Not satisfied with sitting tentatively in the "stranded outpost" which is the third armchair of "a room in which normally only two intimate people sit", he wants to be allowed "'to come here, be here, in and out of here, on and off – at the same time, always'" (129-30, 32). It is a "'delightful flat'", he says; "'all your things are so pretty'" (29, 27). Even the surgical kitchen is, to him, a "'neat little affair'" (134). "'He likes it here'", Stella later tells Robert: "'He likes the ash trays for instance: he's always fingering things. That may be

it, really: he wants to live here'" (283). At one point Harrison asks her: "'Is it so odd I should want a place of my own?'", and in wartime it seems a reasonable question to ask (34). The trimmings of home must seem entrancing to a man whose job it is to police a rocky public realm, and it is not unusual for men to conflate them with women. In Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) Antoine Roquentin promenades along the Bouville seafront and reflects that "at this moment […] Communists and Nazis are shooting it out in the streets of Berlin, the unemployed are pounding the pavements of New York, and women at their dressing-tables, in warm rooms, are putting mascara on their eyelashes" (Sartre 1938: 83). In times of upheaval women are both deplored and adored for being pretty, for having pretty things, and for being safely inside.

When Stella finally relents, and offers herself to Harrison to protect Robert, he rejects both her and her flat. The interior, hitherto so enticing, is transformed by her proposition into an overwhelming feminine hole endowed with "insidious pink springy depths" that must, at all costs, be escaped (Bowen 1949: 137). "Repudiat[ing] the pretty dream of the room", he leaps from his chair and, "like an animal blindly wanting to get out of a room", heads for the curtains (137-8). The silence that ensues "could not have been more complete if Harrison had walked straight on out of the window" – a means of egress which, in view of his proven boundary-crossing expertise, does not seem unthinkable to Stella – but in fact he has only been swallowed by the window embrasure (139). Here Stella joins him, "glad to be walled away" by the curtains from a room which, "haunted" by her lover and the knowledge of his treachery, is in fact as *unheimlich* to her as it is to Harrison. The embrasure now becomes a no-man's land between public and private space, a neutral zone from which the two of them watch the blacked-out world outside begin to "resolve itself into particles" (140). And, as the external universe asserts its reality, Stella admits to herself that she recognises its value:

> To her, tonight, 'outside' meant the harmless world: the mischief was in her own and other rooms. The grind and scream of battles, mechanised advances excoriating flesh and country, tearing through nerves and tearing up trees, were indoor-plotted: this was a war of dry cerebration inside windowless walls (142).

The violence manifesting itself in the public realm, it now seems to her, has been incubated in the insidious springy depths of just such private spaces as the one she has been sharing with Robert Kelway.

Louie Lewis, Stella's counterpart in the subplot, always favours the outside. Exhibiting "vagrant habits" more extreme even than Stella's, she cruises London's

streets, parks and open-air theatres in search of soldiers and airmen with whom she hopes to fill a dreadful domestic vacuum (307). A Battle of Britain bomb having obliterated her parents and their house (where, as she says, she "'always used to be'"), she has now been again displaced by a husband who is "absent most appallingly" from their tiny flat (246, 146). Bowen's London is suffused with absence, peopled with the dead who, "absent from the routine which had been life, [now] stamped upon that routine their absence" (91-2). But what Louie finds so difficult about this particular absence is that Tom is not (yet) dead, but away fighting in the war. His chair "gaze[s]" at her no matter how she positions it in the room, and she is never unaware of "the hollow left by [his] body" in her bed (146, 17). Absence is not the same as non-existence, as Sartre reminds us in *Being and Nothingness* (1943); it is, rather, "a structure of *being-there*":

> This room in which I wait for the master of the house reveals to me in its totality the body of its owner: this easy chair is a chair-where-he-sits, this desk is a desk-at-which-he-writes, this window is a window through which there enters the light-which-illuminates-the-objects-which-he-sees. Thus he is outlined everywhere, and this outline is an outline-of-an-object; an object may come at every instant to fill the outline with content. Still the master of the house 'is not there'. He is *elsewhere*; he is *absent* (Sartre 1943: 365).

Absence that leaves outlines, for Louie, might just as well be presence. Intimidated by Tom's traces, and unable to endure an interior where she is "of meaning only to an absent person", she gravitates towards the outdoors because it makes her feel "that she, Louie, *was*" (Bowen 1949: 146, 15). Her claustrophobia, it seems, is born of a profound ontological doubt.

Nettie Morris, meanwhile (Stella's cousin by marriage), is just as thoroughly tyrannised by the outside. Her married life in Ireland, she claims, was blighted by nature, which "'hated'" her, and the cultivated outdoors was no less vindictive (217). "'Once the fields noticed me with him the harvest began failing'" she tells Roderick when he visits her in Wistaria Lodge, the English asylum to which she has retreated in response. Now she wreaks her revenge on the outdoors by evicting it from her consciousness. Sitting in an upper room, with her back emphatically turned to the window out of which troops and military vehicles can be seen "swarming" beyond the garden wall, she has the "unassailing sensation of having nothing but nothing behind her back" (204, 206). It is the kind of extreme opting out in which the protagonists of "The Yellow Wallpaper", *Hell*, "The Mark on the Wall" and *The Metamorphosis*

indulge. Denying the outdoors allows Nettie to bask in "her own existence […] condensing round her in pure drops" (215). Her position is the reverse of Louie's: outside is nothingness, and it is the indoors that confirms her being.

In *The Poetics of Space* (1957) Gaston Bachelard considers the "dialectic of division" created by the notion of inside and outside – a dialectic which, he says, tends to be conflated with ideas of "being and non-being", "yes and no" "here and there", "this side and beyond" (Bachelard 1957: 211-12). It is a dialectic of which *The Heat of the Day* is extremely conscious. In Stella's two-roomed flat, for example, "whichever you were not in was 'the other room'", and Cousin Nettie is where she is because "'there seemed to be nowhere for me but here or there'" (Bowen 1949: 51, 213). Harrison's observation that war intensifies the inside/outside opposition and its here/there variant ("'It's funny about the war – the way everyone's on one side or the other'") is one for which Bachelard offers an explanation (31). "Formal opposition is incapable of remaining calm", he writes, and is inevitably "tinged with aggressivity" (Bachelard 1957: 212). But war breaks divisions down as fast as it shores them up, and it is the riskiness of this disintegration that *The Heat of the Day* seeks to point out. Walking through London after a visit to Holme Dene, Stella feels a sudden sense of foreboding:

> The physical nearness of the Enemy – how few were the miles between the capital and the coast, between coast and coast – became palpable. Tonight, the safety-curtain between the here and the there had lifted; the breath of danger and sorrow travelled over freely from shore to shore (Bowen 1949: 126).

It is frightening to think that safety curtains have been quietly lifting in the outside world while she has been holed up with her lover behind her blackout blind. Stella draws a blank, however, when she raises the issue with Robert. He agrees with her observation that "'outside us neither of us when we are together ever seems to look'", and can see no problem with it (188). Robert out-Netties Nettie in his views on the inside/outside dichotomy. While the rest of London enjoys an increasing permeability – in "the wall between the living and the living", for example, and even "the wall between the living and the dead" – Robert doggedly preserves his thick skin (92). Stella remarks upon his extraordinary "disassociation from other people"; he himself comments on feeling "'encased'", and estranged from "'other brains'", and when his niece embraces him for the last time she feels, as "their brain cases touched", that she has experienced a "contact of absolute separations she was not to forget" (181, 279, 266). His respect for boundaries, however, extends no further than the walls of Stella's

flat. When she asks him, after accusing him of passing secrets to the enemy: "'Why are you against this country?'" his reply is a baffled: "'I don't see what you mean – what *do* you mean? Country? – there are no more countries left; nothing but names. What country have you and I outside this room?'" (267). Her definition of "country" as "'this, where we are'" means nothing to him. Petra Rau is right to observe that "Bowen leaves Kelway's ideology rather oblique, affiliating him to neither communism nor fascism" (Rau 2005: 44-5). There is a clear alignment between Holme Dene and Nazism (it would be impossible to miss those "swastika arms of passage"), but it is equally clear that Robert has been trying to escape Holme Dene all his adult life (Bowen 1949: 258). It may be that he has, as Kristine Miller argues in *British Literature and the Blitz* (2009), blundered into political fascism in his headlong flight from "the domestic fascism of Holme Dene"; or it may be that it is the Soviet Union for whom he is spying (Miller, K. 2009: 47). The erasure of national borders, after all, is a feature of the rhetoric of both fascism and communism. It seems to me, though, that Robert *no longer cares* about borders. For him the world outside "this, where we are" is a cloudy amalgam of otherness, in which boundaries between friend and enemy, and indeed between enemy and enemy, have lost all meaning. Having devalued the outside to the point where he denies it differentiation, Robert sits in Stella's flat, just as Nettie sits in her asylum, sensing "nothing, but nothing" behind the obstinate back he has turned to the window (Bowen 1949: 273).

Stella's relationship with windows, on the other hand, has moved on. From a London train she looks through rows of back windows and observes with envy how "frankly life in these houses […] exposed itself to the eyes in the passing or halting trains" (293-4). It is a life lived at eye-level, which bears no resemblance to the secret, upstairs one she has been leading with Robert. It now seems to her that her blinds and curtains have been hiding a dreadful internal corruption, and she feels an increasing desire to "crash the window open and blaze the lights on" – to violate the blackout (286). When she confronts Robert she is lifting the curtain between private and public, and cutting short her collusion in his "hermetic world". It is, for him, a devastating act of private betrayal. Not only has Stella summarily removed the only boundary he cares about, but now she is treacherously insisting that the political boundaries they had agreed to relegate to "the junk-yard of what does not matter" matter after all, and that he has transgressed them. But the most unwelcome boundary of all is the one she erects when she stalks "into the other room, in which he was not", and slams the door behind

her (276). It is a political gesture that proclaims her solidarity with the world, and consigns him to "there", "the other side", "the enemy". With Harrison stolidly posted on the doorstep, there is nowhere for Robert to go but the roof.

In *The Heat of the Day* vertigo competes with claustro- and agoraphobia as London's dominant neurosis. In wartime there is danger in height. Londoners walk the streets with caution, "swerving clear of buildings liable at any time to be struck and fall", and listening for loose gutters creaking overhead on damaged houses (315). Louie, in search of Stella's flat after she hears of Robert's fall ("or leap") from the roof, scans the "chattering variation of architecture" and is dizzied by the "discrepantly high parapets" (291-2). During a similar attack of giddiness Stella almost falls from a parapet in Ireland, and she becomes increasingly aware of heights, roofs, and vaulted station ceilings as the moment approaches for her to confront Robert. With his death the novel's upward trajectory is abruptly reversed. Her account of her actions at the coroner's court reproduces his fall:

> I suggested I should go down [...] I went down later [...] I simply went down [...] I went down and opened the street door [...] I say, I simply went down [...] I simply thought I would go downstairs [...] I went downstairs, I went downstairs [...] Thank you (302-5).

But it is not a permanent change of direction. At the end of the novel Harrison finds Stella living on the seventh floor of a block that "teetered its height up into the dangerous night", in another borrowed flat (315). He is sceptical when she announces her forthcoming marriage to "a cousin of a cousin", pointing out that it seems "'far from fair on the chap'" to be insisting on "'skittering round in a top-floor flat on a night like this, with this heavy stuff coming down all over the place'" (321-2). Kristine Miller's citing of a 1944 Mass Observation Report to argue that Stella is guaranteeing her security by following a regiment of middle and upper-class women into marriage is not, in my view, supported by the text (Miller, K. 2009: 51). Marriage is certainly an option for her – just as the basement, technically, was a viable means of escape for Robert. But it is never going to happen. Stella's "vagrant, echo-aroused smile" is not the smile of a sensible woman seeking security (Bowen 1949: 316). Her preference for precarious teetering is born of the same impulse as Robert's choice of the roof: it is disordered, vertiginous, suicidal.

The fact is that Stella is not at home anywhere. Of the various habitats that offer themselves it is Mount Morris – the Big House in Ireland bequeathed to her son by her

cousin – that seems the most promising. There is no blackout in Ireland; and, when she goes there on Roderick's behalf, she is dazzled by windows that "not only showed and shone but blazed, seemed to blaze out phenomenally", as though "the exciting sensation of being outside war had concentrated itself round those fearless lights" (167). Ireland's neutrality means it can afford to be generous, both with its light and its room. In Mount Morris itself "the indoor air [...] held something outdoor" – a spatial mingling refreshing to Stella after the stifling interiors to which she is accustomed (163). And while the blitz has blasted history out of London's walls, in Mount Morris memory is allowed to inhabit architecture. She can feel it in the "weathered woodwork", the "declivities of the treads of the staircase", and the "sifted near-and-farness of smells of plaster" (166). Unfortunately, though, there seems to be a fault in the connection between Stella, the house and its memories. The manservant allocates her a bedroom "with no history" which she does not remember, and the drawing room does not touch her as she hoped it would. With "the nerves of her fingers" she explores its "veneers and mouldings, corded edges [and] taut fluted silk", but the close contact gives her only "the sense of some sense in herself missing" (173). Actually, of course, Mount Morris is as borrowed as all the other houses she has occupied since her divorce. Cousin Francis has bypassed her in favour of Roderick, and she can play but a "ghostly part" in her ancestral home (164). She is quite happy, though, to return to London to her flimsy top-floor flat, and to leave the more solid walls to the next generation. She has enough self-awareness to know that the "sense in herself missing" is a wholehearted attachment to architecture.

It was in 1948, the year before the publication of *The Heat of the Day*, that Sigfried Giedion issued his summons for a "man in equipoise" to heal the historical and spatial rifts that were blighting the twentieth century (Giedion 1948: 720). His balanced man, he was at pains to point out, was "new only in contrast to a distorted period" – a period afflicted by the aggressive oppositions between "inner and outer reality" and "yesterday and tomorrow" (720, 723). Not himself spectacularly modern, he must be able to "carry both the burden of the past and the responsibility for the future", to "revive age-old demands which must be fulfilled in our own way if our civilisation is not to collapse" – to accept history, in other words, and harness it in the century's service (723). When Francis Morris bequeaths his house to Roderick, "in the hope that he may care in his own way to carry on the old tradition", he is hoping for a better conduit between past and future than Stella would have made (Bowen 1949: 87).

He himself has managed Mount Morris with a respect for both old and new, adding "an air-conditioning plant, a room-to-room telephone, an electric dish-washer, and a fireproof roof" to original heating, lighting and plumbing systems (77). Stella, Nettie and their female progenitors, who all sat in the drawing room "in vain listening for meaning in the loudening ticking of the clock", are of no use to him (174). Roderick is a much more suitable heir. From the moment he hears of his inheritance, "the house came out to meet his growing capacity for an attachment" – a capacity entirely lacking in his mother – and he immediately recognises that it guarantees him "what might be called a historic future" (50). Colonel Pole is quite wrong to assert at Francis's funeral that Mount Morris is "'the last sort of thing that *his* generation wants'" (82). Roderick's generation, on the contrary, is seeking some architectural roots.

Robert Kelway and Stella Rodney are typical specimens of Giedion's distorted century. While Robert joins Gregor Samsa, and the narrators of *Hell* and "The Yellow Wallpaper", in shoring up the boundary between self and world, Stella, like Sue Bridehead and Dominique Francon before her, reaches vertiginously for height, transparency and empty space. It is her son who must walk Giedion's tightrope; and, like so many of the century's literary survivors, he achieves it with a characteristic spatial insouciance. Stella wonders with "anxiety mingled with self-reproach" how it would be "if he came to set too much store by a world of which she, both as herself and as an instrument of her century, had deprived him", but actually he does not share her neurotic nomadism (61). When she points out the potential drawbacks of being a landowner while still serving in the army "the tranquil Roderick" observes that "'Mount Morris won't run away'"; and, when she continues to fret that "'the roof may fall in, or the trees blow down'", he replies: "'I don't suppose so'" (89). His attachment to walls is not accompanied by doubts as to their fundamental solidity, and he is equally unworried by doors. Access to houses comes easily to him, and he is immediately comfortable once inside. When London gives one of its "galvanic shudders", as he sleeps on Stella's agoraphobic sofa, "an echo ran through his relaxed limbs", but he does not wake (65). Wistaria Lodge, variously described by the novel's narrator as a "powerhouse of nothingness" and a "hive of lives in abeyance", is to Roderick "no more peculiar than any other abode"; and in Mount Morris "he remembered his mother's saying he must have been conceived here, but only perfunctorily did he wonder in which room" (203, 311). His egress from buildings, meanwhile, is as smooth as his access. To leave the obstinately inward-facing Wistaria Lodge he simply "unlatched

the gate to the outer world", and at Mount Morris he is as keen to investigate its grounds as its interior: "'I want to go out and get the hang of everything [...] not that this is not a very nice room of course [...] but it's baffling not to know what goes on outside it'" (218, 310). Back inside he takes control of the night-time locking up, and goes to bed "full of the outdoors, which welled up in him" (311). Utterly secure in his relationship with the world, he can afford to allow the outside to penetrate not only his walls but (the penetration most dreaded by Robert) his own skin. As he falls asleep: "the darkness was nothing to him but a veil between himself and tomorrow, and his nostrils sifted out nothing but an enticing newness from the plastery smells" (310-11). Boundaries are so much less charged with significance than they are for his mother. For Roderick a wall is but a wall with a plastery smell, a tightrope easily walked by a post-war generation that has a comfortable command of space.

The novel ends with a promise of peace-time reconciliation between both space and architecture, and past and future. When Louie takes her baby to the site of her demolished childhood home she finds "the thin air which had taken the house's place" is not as empty as she had expected (329). Not only is the "distance as far as the eye could see [...] after all full of today and sunshine", but underfoot "the ridges left by the foundations feathered and stirred with grass in light and shadow". Quite different from the signs of "appalling" absence that drove her from her marital home, these are comforting traces of presence – reminders that, as Sartre insists in *Being and Nothingness*, "nothingness carries being at its heart" (Sartre 1943: 42). When she lifts the infant Tom from his perambulator, and holds him up to the sky, Louie is not sending him wheeling into ineffable space. The remnants of his grandparents' bungalow lie behind him, anchoring him securely to history.

Albert Camus's "Jonas" (1957)

"Distance as far as the eye could see" did not long remain a feature of the post-war western landscape, in fiction as well as fact. In J.G. Ballard's apocalyptic short story "Billennium" (1961), the inhabitants of a grotesquely overpopulated city compete for living space. It is many years since there has been room for vehicles on the pedestrian-congested thoroughfares, and people are often trapped for days in huge bottlenecks of human bodies at street junctions. To house the city's thirty million people, public buildings have either been razed to the ground and replaced by "housing batteries", or

divided into thousands of tiny cubicles (Ballard 1961: 268). The city's housing department requires landlords to provide each tenant with at least four square metres of living space (rising to six for a married couple), but unscrupulous landlords have developed ingenious techniques for increasing revenue by manipulating space. They measure area, for example, on ceilings rather than floors; then tilt partitions to hoodwink the tenants. In an attempt to thwart these strategies, ceilings have been "criss-crossed with pencil marks staking out the rival claims of tenants on opposite sides of a party wall". Ultimately, though, nothing can prevent a tenant "timid of his rights" being "literally squeezed out of existence"; and now rumours are rife that the required minimum living space is to be reduced to three square metres. There is no room in the Ballardian city for Le Corbusier's modulor man, six feet tall and with his arm raised. As the protagonists ruefully agree, there will soon be no room to sit, let alone lie down. In 1984 the narrator of Martin Amis's *Money* drives up the street where he lives, and realises "you just cannot park round here any more":

> You can double park on people: people can double park on you. Cars are doubling while houses are halving. Houses divide, into two, into four, into sixteen. If a landlord or developer comes across a decent-sized room he turns it into a labyrinth, a Chinese puzzle. The bell-button grills in the flakey porches look like the dashboards of ancient spaceships. Rooms divide, rooms multiply. Houses split – houses are triple parked. People are doubling also, dividing, splitting. In double trouble we split our losses. No wonder we're bouncing off the walls (Amis 1984: 63).

One of the features of late capitalism, argues Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1974), is the commodification of space. "In the past", he writes: "one bought or rented land. Today what are bought (and, less frequently, rented) are *volumes* of space: rooms, floors, flats, apartments, balconies, various facilities (swimming-pools, tennis courses, parking spaces, etc.)" (337). As post-war populations increased the demand for these "volumes of space" also increased, and so did their market value. What decreased, however, was the size of each "volume"; and it is the resultant splitting of space that Ballard and Amis are addressing in these extracts.

The eponymous painter of Albert Camus's "Jonas" or "The Artist at Work", published in the collection *Exile and the Kingdom* in 1957, is delighted when his competent new wife finds ("in the midst of a housing crisis") a second-floor apartment in the fashionable artists' quarter of Paris (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 59). The eighteenth-century town house has an "original character" which has been enhanced by some "very modern arrangements" that consist of "offering its residents a great volume of air while

occupying only a limited surface" (60). The majestic rooms were clearly intended for "grand receptions and ceremonial dress", but "the necessities of urban crowding and real-estate profits" have obliged landlords to divide them up with partitions, "and so to multiply the stalls, which they rented at top dollar to their herd of tenants". Undismayed by the unfeasibility of partitioning vertical space in the same way, the landlords promote the unrivalled "square footage of air", and charge extortionate rates for heating the exceptionally high-ceilinged rooms and curtaining their immense windows. Camus's story, like those of Ballard and Amis, demonstrates how difficult it is for the human being to fit into an overcrowded post-war world.

Gilbert Jonas's apartment boasts a living room, two small bedrooms, a tiny kitchen, a toilet and "a cubby hole graced with the name of shower room", which "could indeed pass as such providing they installed the fixture vertically and were willing to receive the beneficial spray standing absolutely still" (61). Art and life can both be accommodated, the couple decides, so long as the largest room serves as a studio during the day, a living room in the evenings, and a dining room at mealtimes. "Besides", they agree: "they could eat in the kitchen if necessary, provided that Jonas or Louise was willing to stand" (61-2). It is with the birth of their three children that "the problem of usable space" begins to "prevail over other household problems" (60). The reality is that art and life have always been set in opposition, for all their efforts to reconcile them. As a young man Jonas was so "entirely consumed" by painting that he had no thought of marriage, and it took a motorbike accident to immobilise his painting arm for long enough "to notice Louise Poulin as she deserved" (58). In the early days of their courtship Louise determined to involve herself fully in his work, devoting herself first to literature, then, when he relinquished his job in his father's publishing house to paint full time, to the plastic arts. Immersing herself in her husband's new profession, she insisted he accompany her to museums and exhibitions of contemporary art, to boost his artistic education. Motherhood, however, has caused the partnership to founder. Louise has increasingly "devoted herself entirely to her child, then to her children. She still tried to help her husband, but she had no time" (59). And if shortage of time has resulted in a stark division of labour, shortage of space has led to its obverse: a chaotic mingling of art and life. Before the birth of the third child, Jonas worked in the large room, Louise knitted in the bedroom, and "the two children occupied the last room, romping around in there, then tumbling freely through the rest of the apartment" (62). Now, though, a new-born baby must be housed. Having agreed with Louise that

the solution is more partitioning, Jonas uses his canvases to enclose a corner of his studio. The wall between art and life, however, proves too thin. Jonas is constantly distracted by the baby's "insistent and sovereign voice", by Louise's over-dramatised efforts to quieten him (during which "at any moment [she is] liable to snag one of the canvases", thereby presenting a very literal threat to art), and by his own paternal instincts. The problem with a baby, as Cyril Connolly (the English intellectual and friend of the bohemian Montparnasse set) pointed out in 1938, is that it is "even less capable of seeing the artist's point of view" than a wife (Connolly 1938: 127). At this stage in the tale, certainly, Jonas would agree with Connolly's bitter conclusion that "there is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall".

It is not just family that encroaches on the artist's space. Jonas's success "earn[s] him many friends" – admirers, disciples, art dealers and society ladies keen to associate themselves with an artistic circle (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 63). Actually there is some doubt as to whether these ladies have the smallest interest in art. It seems to be the everyday life of the underprivileged artist that attracts them. They like to stay into the evening to watch Louise put the children to bed, on the basis that their own two-storey town houses are "so much less cosy and intimate than at the Jonas household" (70). As for the disciples: "some had painted, others were going to paint", and, although they clearly have no *current* plans to take up a paintbrush, all claim to hold "artistic efforts in high esteem" and deplore "the organisation of the modern world that makes it so difficult to pursue those very efforts" (63). The critics, too, understand the artist's need for peace and quiet – or so they tell Jonas, as they "go on talking late into the night, about art of course, but especially about painters without talent, plagiarists or self-promoters, who were not there" (64). This is a segment of the "horde of shrieking poseurs" that George Orwell found thronging the Parisian cafés, but here the horde is worse, because has penetrated the artist's home (Orwell 1940: 10). And, as the crowd of people orbiting the apartment swells, the intrusion worsens. The family is augmented first by the arrival of Louise's sister and niece (whose "virtue and selflessness" are inflamed by "the tedium of their solitary lives and their pleasure in the ease they found at Louise's"); then by her sister's husband's cousin, who ostensibly comes to help with the sewing, but actually prefers to sit and watch Jonas work (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 72). The society ladies, meanwhile, recruit others to help them serve tea to the visitors, a ceremony in which Jonas acquiesces with the meekness of T. S. Eliot's disillusioned modern man, J. Alfred Prufrock:

> The cups passed from hand to hand, travelled down the hallway from the kitchen to the large room, coming round again to rest in the small studio where Jonas, amidst a handful of friends and visitors who filled the room, continued to paint until he had to set down his paintbrushes to accept, with gratitude, the cup that a fascinating lady had filled specially for him (69).

And, circling the apartment beyond the friends and flatterers, is the wider world. The more famous Jonas becomes, the more he is called upon to "denounce grievous injustices" and sign "high-minded protests" (67-8). His friend, Rateau, advises him to leave politics to the "writers and unattractive spinsters", but it is easier said than done (68). Jonas tries to limit his political involvement by signing only non-partisan protests but, as he explains to Rateau, *all* claim to be non-partisan. He remembers his mother's propensity to "mak[e] a gift of herself to suffering humanity" – a propensity that his father cited as grounds for their divorce. "'I've had enough of being cuckolded by the poor'", said the father to a youthful Jonas, with a lack of sympathy of which Ayn Rand would have approved (57). Now literally weighed down by the correspondence that streams daily through his letterbox, and always vulnerable to the tyrannous telephone's "imperative ring", Jonas knows what his father meant (63). There is no end, it seems, to the number of conduits through which people can gain access to the modern artist, and the disproportionate windows are an additional problem. Their "vast glass surfaces" mean the apartment is "literally violated by light" (61). Louise agrees with Jonas that they only need to curtain the bedroom ("'We have nothing to hide', said that pure heart'") and in the daytime, as a result, the family is caught in the merciless glare:

> The truly extraordinary height of the ceilings and the cramped nature of the rooms made this apartment an odd assemblage of almost entirely glassed in parallelepipeds, all doors and windows, where furniture could find no supporting wall and human beings, lost in the white and violent light, seemed to float like bottled imps in a vertical aquarium.

Not only is the apartment "full to bursting" with family, friends and followers but, while Jonas paints, "often neighbours would appear at the windows across the way and this would add to his public" (70, 66). Convinced that all that is required is "a good household arrangement", and working on the assumption that "surely visitors wouldn't dare stretch out on their bed", he decides to retire with his easel to the marital bedroom (71, 74). When the assumption proves unfounded (lying on a double bed, the friends discover, is by far the most comfortable vantage point from which to watch an artist at work), he retreats to the hall, then to the shower room, then the kitchen. But there is

nowhere to hide from "the people he encountered everywhere, those he hardly knew and his own family, whom he loved" (74). It seems to be impossible to stay inside the apartment and keep his work separate from his family, his family separate from his friends, and his friends separate from his work.

Another of the enemies of promise listed by Connolly, and one probably more pernicious than the pram in the hallway, is success. Success, he warns, is "a kind of moving staircase" on which the artist "is carried upwards, encouraged by publicity, by fan-mail, by the tributes of critics and publishers and by the friendly clubmanship of his new companions" (Connolly 1938: 133). But the artist would be wise to remember, says Connolly, that failure haunts success, and that "every admirer is a potential enemy". He should take care to "listen for the death-watch, listen for the faint toc-toc, the critic's truth sharpened by envy, the embarrassed praise of a sincere friend, the silence of gifted contemporaries, the implications of the dog in the manger, the visitor in the small hours" (135). Rateau offers Jonas a similar warning: "'Watch out'", he says of the friends and followers: "'They're not all good'" (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 71). Jonas's reputation begins to wane as he struggles to keep up with the demands made upon him, and increasingly his admirers begin to look more like enemies. "'He's on the way out'", one says to Rateau, as they watch Jonas being painted, while he paints, by an official artist (70). "'He's finished […] Now they're painting him and they'll hang him on the wall'". The actual instigator of Jonas's ensuing exile is open to debate. The story's epigraph ("Cast me into the sea … for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you") undoubtedly aligns him with his biblical namesake, and strongly suggests that it is Jonas's community that expels him (56). Actually, of course, it is at Jonah's suggestion that the sailors cast him out, and, when the Parisian intelligentsia begins to expel Jonas, it too finds itself pushing against an open door. As his critics begin to write negative articles, as his sales decline, as fewer people visit, and those that do treat him with less deference, Jonas begins to absent himself not only from the apartment, but from the artists' quarter in which it is located. The sanctuary he failed to find in hall, shower and kitchen he now finds in "outlying neighbourhoods where no one knew him" (75). Here he makes a few "undemanding" friends, and, if he meets an acquaintance who wants to converse about art, he is "seized with panic", "want[s] to flee", and does so. Jonas's exile is, at least partly, voluntary.

Reluctant as he is to *talk* about painting, Jonas does intend to *paint* while out in the world. But the world is a distracting place. He devises projects "to sketch a detail,

a tree, a crooked house, a profile glimpsed in passing", but he finds that "the slightest temptation – the newspapers, a chance meeting, the shop windows, the warmth of a café – held him spellbound". He has to admit that even during the brief quiet moments when he is supposedly painting in his bedroom "the hand holding the paintbrush would hang at his side as he listened to a distant radio" (73). The fact is that he is unproductive both inside and out, and an additional cause of sorrow is that in escaping his hangers-on he has also separated himself from his family. When "a living pain with its ravaged face […] in the person of Louise" comes to find him one morning, he has been drinking the whole of the previous day, and is now in bed with a prostitute (76). Enough is enough, he decides. His exile needs another venue.

Like Jonas, "Billennium"'s protagonists have to engage in a great deal of woodwork and partitioning to secure enough living space, but at least Ballard eventually allows them the luxury of finding a forgotten room (Ballard 1961: 274). Jonas, on the other hand, has to resort to building himself "a kind of narrow loft, both high and deep" in a top corner of the extraordinarily high-ceilinged hallway (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 77). Adèle King, one of Camus's early critics, argued that this loft "parallels Jonah's whale", and suggested that the difference between Jonas and his biblical namesake is that "he does not simply allow himself to be swallowed by a whale, he builds his own 'whale'" (King 1966: 268). I think she was wrong, though, to see Jonas as a more proactive version of Jonah. In fact, in the bible story, the whale's belly is not the only container in which Jonah goes to ground. He also builds himself a "booth" on a mountainside, after the whale has vomited him out (Jonah: 4:5). This may at first sight seem to show more initiative than simply "allowing himself to be swallowed", but actually the booth's purpose should be borne in mind. It is a shelter from which Jonah intends passively to watch what happens to Nineveh. He retreats to his booth for the same reason that Gregor Samsa grows a chitinous shell and scuttles under his sofa, and Robert Kelway tucks himself inside his girlfriend's flat. He is washing his hands of the world, ducking his responsibilities, hiding in a hole.

Jonas's rationale for his new "household arrangement" is that he "'must paint'", and there is no doubt that boxing oneself in a corner is a temptation, both for the artist and for the human being (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 77). "What the artist needs is *loneliness*", says the narrator of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), a struggling writer in the bohemian community of Paris (Miller, H. 1934: 66). Connolly advises that the artist should not allow more than a year to go by without "finding himself in his

rightful place of composition, the small single unluxurious 'retreat' of the twentieth century, the hotel bedroom" (Connolly 1938: 126) and it is in a hotel bedroom, of course, that *Hell*'s narrator finds the "perfect purity" of solitude (Barbusse, 1908: 19). "A bomb-proof ivory tower", Connolly later recommends as an alternative hideout, in which the artist can "continue to celebrate the beauty which the rest of mankind will be too guilty, hungry or arid to remember" (Connolly 1938: 150). King suggested that Camus might have been familiar with Orwell's "Inside the Whale", and it is a convincing hypothesis (King 1966: 269). In the essay Orwell muses on "the hold that the Jonah myth has upon our imaginations", and concludes that "the fact is that being inside a whale is a very comfortable, cosy, homelike thought" (Orwell 1940: 42). It is like being in a womb, he says: "There you are, in the dark, cushioned space that exactly fits you, with yards of blubber between yourself and reality, able to keep up an attitude of the completest indifference, no matter *what* happens" (43). Jonah's quietist message to the world, Orwell claims, is: "'sit on your bum'", and he goes on to ask: "In a time like ours, is this a defensible attitude?" The question is equally apposite whether one is in a whale belly, a booth on a mountainside, a hotel bedroom, or an ivory tower, and it is the same question that Camus poses when he has Jonas climb up the stepladder to his loft. Is it defensible to keep oneself walled off from the universe, and from other people? In "The Artist and his Time" (1957) Camus challenges the "What the artist needs is *loneliness*" school of thought. "Contrary to the current presumption, if there is any man who has no right to solitude it is the artist" he insists, in a forceful attack on aestheticism (Camus, "The Artist and his Time" 1957: 181). "Art for art's sake", devised in the nineteenth century for "the entertainment of a solitary artist", is the credo of "a factitious and self-absorbed society" and has no place in the midst of twentieth-century "din" (180, 176). The twentieth century, specifically, is an epoch in which the artist must *not* lock himself in an ivory tower. The modern artist is "in the amphitheatre" whether he likes it or not, and he has no right to withdraw (176-7). Camus endorses neither Jonas's father's cold-shouldering of "suffering humanity", nor Rateau's supercilious injunction to leave politics to the spinsters. The instigator of the doorbell's imperious demand is a young activist with a letter of protest on behalf of the "'convicts in Kashmir'" – an intrusion on a par with the intrusion of the First World War in "The Mark on the Wall", rather than with the simultaneous demand from a "fascinating lady" that Jonas paint her portrait (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 69). Discernment is important, but

Jonas must also learn that if art "takes shape outside of society" it "cuts itself off from its living roots" (180). There is no point, ultimately, to a man in a loft.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that Jonas's retreat is a temporary measure. As he climbs the stepladder he gives Rateau a message for his family: "'I'm not leaving them. Be sure to tell them: I'm not leaving them'" (79). Even when he starts refusing food, and takes his bedding up with him, he leaves the ladder in place to keep alive his connection with the world. Some early critics, including King and Gaëtan Picon, erroneously claimed that Jonas dies in the loft (King 1966: 271; Picon 1962: 152). While it is certainly true he collapses, in fact the doctor called in by Louise and Rateau declares his illness to be "'nothing'" – the result of overwork and, no doubt, lack of food (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 80). When Louise presses him – "'He will get well, you're quite sure?'" – the doctor is adamant: "'He'll be on his feet in a week […] He will get well'". Weak as he is, Jonas does not suffer Gregor Samsa's fate; he is not swept away by a hard-hearted char. He is not an "existentialist outsider", as designated by Colin Wilson in 1956 – one of "these men without motive who stay in their rooms because there seems to be no reason for doing anything else" (Wilson 1956: 47). Jonas *has* a motive. Before his retreat he admits to Rateau: "'I'm not certain I exist. But one day I will, I'm sure of that'" (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 71). The purpose of his retreat is "to discover what he had not yet clearly understood, although he had always known it, and had always painted as if he knew it. He had to grasp at long last that secret which was not merely the secret of art, he could see" (78). What he must grasp is the secret of existence – the value of life in the absence of God. Camus's parable is about the coming to maturity of an artist, and also of a human being. Like Jonah's sojourn in the booth outside Nineveh, this is more learning process than punishment. The loft is not a coffin, but a chrysalis.

Jonas's exile, as much spiritual as it is physical, seems to require complete darkness. He says he is working, but the nature of the work is "meditation" rather than painting, and he does not light his lamp for days (78). The apartment downstairs has always been "flooded with a harsh light", and he finds its absence "restful" to the eyes (77). Light has been a clamorous element, for Camus, ever since *The Outsider* (1942). It dazzles Meursault from the early scene in the blindingly white mortuary where "there wasn't a shadow to be seen and every object, every angle and curve stood out so sharply that it was painful to the eyes", to the murder scene in which the "cymbals of the sun" "clash against [his] forehead", and the light reflected from the Arab's knife is a

"dazzling spear" that "goug[es] out [his] stinging eyes"(Camus 1942: 15, 60). Ensconced in his loft, like Bowen's Robert Kelway in his photographer's dark room, Jonas gets a break from the glare, and sound too is softened:

> The only noises he heard clearly were coming from the kitchen or the toilet. Other sounds seemed distant, and the visits, the ringing of the doorbell or the telephone, the comings and goings, the conversations reached him half muffled, as if they were coming from the street or from the other courtyard (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 77).

There comes a time, indeed, when Jonas has withdrawn so far into his exile that even these sounds lose their significance, and "the half-silence […], compared to his previous experience, seemed to him the silence of the desert or the grave". For the first time he has the opportunity "to listen to his own heart". Camus's story, though, is not endorsing this position. Deserts and graves are not appropriate long-term environments for young men of thirty-five. Jonas is now so disconnected from the universe that he resembles "those men who die at home alone in their sleep, and when morning comes the telephone rings and keeps ringing, urgent and insistent, in the deserted house, over a corpse forever deaf" (77-8). Jonas, actually, is neither deaf nor dead, and the telephone ought to be answered. Having sat in the darkness for days, he suddenly calls for kerosene.

The lighting of the lamp signals Jonas's reconnection with the world beyond the loft: "He heard his children shouting, the water running, the dishes clinking. Louise was talking. The huge windows rattled as a truck passed on the boulevard. The world was still there, young, lovable: Jonas listened to the lovely murmur of humanity" (79). The lamplight is not the "violating" kind of light that streams through the windows of the rooms downstairs. It represents, rather, what Camus has called "lucidity" since *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) – a concept which David Sprintzen succinctly defines as "the insistence on squarely facing the consequences of the absurd confrontation" (Sprintzen 1988: 270). Life has no "meaning", but it does have value, as will become apparent if one allows oneself to listen to humanity's "lovely murmur", and to contribute to it. In 1958 Hannah Arendt wrote of the "privation of privacy":

> To live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an 'objective' relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them through the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself (Arendt 1958: 205).

Her allegory about Martin Heidegger's withdrawal to his Black Forest hermitage, "Heidegger the Fox" (1953), too, is testament to her distaste for intellectual retreat (Arendt 1953: 543-4). When Jonas lights his lamp it marks an epiphany. Like Dominique Francon after Cortlandt, and Roderick Rodney at Mount Morris, he is letting the outside in. Permanently to exile oneself is to surrender to the nihilism to which Camus, like Arendt, profoundly objected; and the artist, like the philosopher, should not consider himself an exception. The rift between Jonas's family and his creative self (which he always thinks of as his "star") is one he must work to heal. Through his exile he has come to understand that if he were deprived of his children "he would find nothing but emptiness and solitude", and that "he loved them as much as his painting because they alone in all the world were as alive as it was" (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 73). Connolly was wrong: The artist, actually, *needs* a pram in his hallway.

When Rateau climbs up to the loft after Jonas's collapse, he finds no evidence that the artist has been working, even since he turned on his lamp. While it is true that the tale has established one cannot paint in a vacuum, there is actually some doubt as to whether Jonas has *ever*, really, deserved to be considered an artist. He finds frequent occasion to mention his great love for painting, and yet, we are told, he only takes it up to fill the idle hours at his father's publishing house. It is a pastime in which he "effortlessly excels", and yet for an "artist at work" he has an unusual "taste for inertia" (58). He is the first to admit that "he had done nothing to merit what he achieved", and he has no idea by what fluke he came to receive the regular stipend from his art dealer (56). It suits him better to think of the "star" on which he relies as a symbol of luck than talent, and there seems to be a total lack of connection between his artistic inclination and reputation, and his productivity. Until Louise takes him in hand he has no understanding of art history, and she herself has gleaned most of her knowledge from the tabloid press. His conversation is "banal", and he is unable to put his work into any kind of context (63). He has "only a vague idea of his own aesthetic", although others seem to believe he has one:

> The disciples explained to Jonas at length what he had painted, and why. Jonas discovered in his work many intentions that rather surprised him, and a host of things he had not put there […]. 'It's true, though' he would say to himself. 'That face in the background really does stand out. I don't honestly understand

> what they mean by indirect humanization. Yet I've gone rather far with that technique' (64-5).

Jonas's success is based entirely on the judgement of others, and yet the tale's ironic tone constantly calls this judgement into question. There is a character whose judgement we are always encouraged to trust, however, and Rateau's role deserves some attention.

Rateau is Jonas's good, solid friend – the "devoted brother" and adviser who has "loved Jonas and his star since their school days" (56-7). He has round-the-clock access to the artist (even when Jonas is in his loft he makes a point of climbing up the stepladder to wish him goodnight), and Jonas frequently thanks him for his love and loyalty. Rateau is also an architect, and a productive one. He makes himself indispensable when Jonas and Louise first move into the apartment, installing "any number of ingenious devices", and "manag[ing] to compensate for the scarcity of furniture" with a series of "sliding doors, retractable shelves and folding tables" (62). He even advises the couple where to put their marriage bed. Later he brings "an ingenious clothes dryer that could be attached to the kitchen ceiling", and when Jonas is in the loft he visits frequently to "help Louise repair the plumbing or fix a lock" (70, 79). Initially he does not take to Louise – it is not a compliment when he designates her "'that little ant'" (58). But it soon transpires that the nickname, intended to disparage her size, better betokens her capacity for hard work:

> [Louise] sparkled brightest in Jonas's daily life. This good angel spared him the purchases of shoes, clothing and underwear that for any normal man shorten the days of an already brief life. She resolutely took charge of the thousand inventions of the time-killing machine, from the obscure paperwork involved in social security to endlessly multiplying fiscal arrangements […]; she telephoned and made appointments at the best times; she took care of oil changes for the car, hotel rentals for vacations, domestic heating; she bought whatever gifts Jonas wanted to give, chose and sent his flowers, and still found time on certain evenings to come by his place in his absence and make up the bed that he would not need to turn down that night before going to sleep (59).

Louise is the artist's helpmeet, and she and Rateau soon form an alliance. They consult each other daily over what is to be done about Jonas, who is perfectly happy to leave his home and children in their capable hands. Like Greta Samsa to Gregor, they are so much more *practical* than he – so much more active and industrious. It is interesting that Jonas does not ask Rateau to help build the loft, although with an architect's input Louise's anxious enquiry ("'is the floor solid?'") might not have been necessary (77).

Rateau does not *offer* to help, either. The artist, it seems, must build the site of his own exile. Throughout the story the architect is the artist's foil, and the former is always aware that his is the easier role. Much is made of Rateau's athletic physique (the children, too, are "cheerful and vigorous"), and his robust opinions contrast starkly with Jonas's passivity, weakness and indecision (72). It is a struggle to be a fledgling artist – a struggle that takes its toll on the body and soul. When Jonas goes out on his Parisian debauch, a waiter asks him what he does for a living. Jonas replies "'painter'", and the waiter asks: "'artist painter or house painter?'" (76). When Jonas replies "'artist'" the waiter observes: "'that's hard'" and, we are told, "they never discussed the subject again". Being an artist is "hard" because, as Camus argues in *The Rebel* (1951), he is both in dispute with the world and negotiating reconciliation (Camus 1951: 224). There is no such anguish, as Rateau is fully aware, in building a laundry rack. It is easy for the architect to participate in the world because his contact with it is so literal, and obviously useful. It is the tortured artist, "Jonas" demonstrates, etiolated in his darkened room, who is left to struggle with the absurdity of human existence.

When Rateau finally gets a look at the canvas on which Jonas has been working, it transpires that actually he has been writing – not painting. The canvas is "entirely blank", but for a single tiny word in its centre, "which could be deciphered, but it was hard to tell whether it should be read as *independent* or *interdependent*" (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 80). Presumably Jonas had the option, when he turned on his lamp, of writing "independent" on one side of the canvas, and "interdependent" on its reverse, but his newfound understanding is better expressed in an ambiguous word. Jacques Derrida's analysis of Stéphan Mallarmé's prose-poem *Mimique* in his "The Double Session" (1970) hinges on the use of the word "hymen". It is the "undecidability", the "in-betweenness" of both membrane and word – signified and signifier – that appeals to Derrida (Derrida 1970: 222-23). "The hymen takes place in the 'inter', in the spacing between desire and fulfillment, between perpetration and its recollection", and therefore in the spacing between present and future (222). It divides inside from outside, and yet also joins them; it inhibits communion, and yet also implies it; and Mallarmé uses it to mean both separation and fusion. The word on Jonas's canvas, I suggest, performs a similar function. There is nothing to be done about the wooden partition between Jonas and world but leave it there, or take it down. Walls are very literal forms, as Rateau, the architect, is in a good position to know. But in the centre of this word which, in the original French, may be *solitaire* or *solidaire*, is that ambiguous letter. Writing has

achieved what will always be impossible for architecture. Suspended between inside and outside – between withdrawing and participating in the world – the *t/d* is the wild card: Derrida's *hymen*; and also Giedion's tightrope. When Jonas was floundering amongst sycophants he tried to cope by preserving polarity – strenuously dividing inside from outside, art from life, and even art from self: "'It's the star', he would say to himself, 'that's going far. As for me, I'm staying close to Louise and the children" (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 64). Now he has matured, as both human being and artist, he must embrace loft, apartment and world. It is "difficult to paint the world and men and to live with them at the same time", as the narrator says, but it must be done (68-9). In an epoch in which "tomorrow the world may burst into fragments", Camus writes in "The Artist and his Time", the artist "becomes unreal if he remains in his ivory tower or sterilised if he spends his time galloping around the political arena" (Camus, "The Artist and his Time" 1957: 169-70). It is his responsibility to know when to participate, and when to keep his distance. Jonas is a manifestation of Giedion's tightrope walker, struggling to keep his balance in a world without God, and where the only certainty is death. It will never be easy for him, unless he chooses the waiter's "house painter" route. "On the ridge where the great artist moves forward, every step is an adventure, an extreme risk", says Camus. He is in a state of "perpetual tension" as he "advances between two chasms" – "beauty and pain, the love of men and the madness of creation, unbearable solitude and the exhausting crowd" (188). Keeping his balance is not about choosing between *solitaire* and *solidaire*, exile and kingdom; he must embrace both.

Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy* (1957)

When it comes to the organisation of domestic space there is enviable concord between the protagonists of "Jonas" – a concord entirely missing from Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*, which was published in the same year. Louise Jonas's tape measure is always primed to accommodate her husband and his work, and the wife of *Jealousy*'s narrator, at first, seems equally diligent (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 66). Her daily orders for the placement of the veranda furniture are that the coffee table is to be placed to her right, her lover's chair to her left, and the chair of his wife (always absent) just beyond the coffee table. Her husband's chair, however, is carefully positioned to cut off his view. The narrator, surprisingly, shows no resistance to these uxorial manoeuvres. Although he could, presumably, move his chair to a more agreeable spot, he chooses instead to stay where he is. Nose to nose with the balustrade, he examines its peeling paintwork

with an attention to detail to rival that paid by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's narrator to her yellow wallpaper:

> In broad daylight, the contrast of the two shades of grey – that of the naked wood and that, somewhat lighter, of the remaining paint – creates complicated figures with angular, almost serrated outlines. On the top of the handrail, there are only scattered, protruding islands formed by the last vestiges of paint. On the balusters, though, it is the unpainted areas, much smaller and generally located towards the middle of the uprights, which constitute the spots, here incised, where the fingers recognise the vertical grain of the wood (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 13-14).

Like Gilman's narrator, he likes to touch, as well as look, and to give the paint a helping hand where it seems inclined to flake: "At the edge of the patches, new scales of the paint are easy to chip off; it is enough to slip a fingernail beneath the projecting edge and pry it up by bending the first joint of the finger; the resistance is scarcely perceptible" (14). Picking at the paintwork is not a pleasure in which he will be able to indulge indefinitely, however, as "the whole balustrade is to be repainted bright yellow: that is what A… has decided" (20). His wife, it seems, has sole jurisdiction over the décor, as well as the furniture.

The narrator takes as keen an interest in interior surfaces as he does in the exterior, and declares the pale grey paint in A…'s bedroom "in good condition", barring a few blemishes caused by missing screws and nails (83). He admires the "striped effect" of the laths that crisscross its walls and ceilings, and the "clearly marked longitudinal interstices" of its floor. Like the protagonists of both "The Yellow Wallpaper" and "The Mark on the Wall", he finds the walls that surround him an absorbing subject of study. As the owner of a banana plantation, he needs to show *some* interest in the external world, but it seems that in practice he can run his business perfectly effectively without ever setting foot beyond his veranda. It is from the house that he issues his orders for the de-infestation of the log bridge that can be seen from his office or his wife's bedroom, and from the house (specifically the living/dining room) that he keeps an eye on the cleared area that serves as a drive, and watches the banana trucks as they wend their way up the dirt track, through the plantation, to the high road it joins beyond his view. At the end of this road lies an anonymous colonial port where the *Cap Saint-Jean* is moored, waiting for its cargo of bananas bound, presumably, for Europe. He likes to look at the photograph of a similar ship on his wife's bedroom wall; he likes the bustle of harbour life depicted there. But he feels no desire to go to the port itself. The commercial world beyond the balustrade is *there*, but

it does not demand his presence. Happy to be housebound, he leaves it to his wife and her lover.

Like Hardy's Arabella, Kafka's Grete, Petry's Min and Bowen's Roderick, A… and Franck are remarkably at ease in the world. While Franck's wife is kept captive on the neighbouring plantation by a sickly child and her own heat intolerance, A… congratulates herself that "she never suffered from the heat, she had known much worse climates than this – in Africa, for instance – and had always felt fine there. Besides, she doesn't feel the cold either. Wherever she is, she keeps quite comfortable" (3). Unruffled by the noonday sun, she is also perfectly relaxed in the most uncomfortable of wrought-iron chairs, and always eats "with a good appetite" (107). Her gait is "decisive" and, as she walks from Franck's car, the "uneven surface of the courtyard seems to level out in front of her" to accommodate her "extremely high heels" (60-1). Franck eats well too, and "utters his usual exclamation as to their comfort" as he commandeers his host's leather armchairs (30). His enthusiasm for cars and trucks proclaims his connection with the world, and A…'s ear is always "cocked" for the sound of his engines, which seems to fill space as pervasively as his person (62). A photograph taken in Europe "after the African trip" proves that there was a time when she and her husband had a life beyond the plantation, and A… still spends much of her time replying to letters from both continents (40). She likes to keep abreast of external events, like the husband of the narrator of "The Mark on the Wall". "'What's new?'" she asks her husband, blithely, on her return from an inadequately explained overnight stay with Franck (49). "'There is nothing new'", he replies, thinking of "the usual series of activities" on the plantation, which are "always the same, for the most part". This, actually, is how he likes it. Like Woolf's narrator, and Bowen's Nettie Morris, he finds events intrusive, and prefers to focus his energies indoors.

The narrator's occupation of the house, however, does not go unchallenged. In *Jealousy*, as in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Wharton's "The Reckoning", while the exterior is allocated to the spouse, the interior is disputed territory. Tensions run high in the relationships between the narrator and Franck, and between A… and Franck, but they are as nothing compared to the simmering hostility that exists, chronically, between husband and wife – a hostility manifested in a battle for control of the house. For most of the novel it is A… who seems to be in the ascendant. The chairs that have been placed as she directed have also been made "according to A…'s instructions by a native craftsman"; the garden has been dug and the orange trees planted "at A…'s

orders", and the servants respond to her every "'mistress of the house' glance" (7, 19, 36). While the narrator is relegated to "a bedroom, much smaller than A…'s, which contains a single bed", A… occupies the main bedroom (*en suite*, of course) from which she delights in shutting him out (46-7). Windows are closed, blinds lowered and doors locked and bolted against him, all with as much noise as possible to emphasise the magnitude of her rejection. Side by side on the veranda she and Franck sit "leaning back in their chairs, arms lying on the elbow rests, their four hands in similar positions, at the same level, lined up parallel to the wall of the house", and when the native boy brings their cocktails he follows an established route that is also "parallel to the wall" (15, 113). Franck's truck is parked in the courtyard, "precisely in the spot intended for it", so that from the dining room window it is "framed between the lower and middle panes of the right-hand window leaf" with the "little crosspiece cutting its outline horizontally into two masses of equal size" (48-9). While A…, and all associated with her, are tidily aligned with the house, the narrator is "set at an angle", "obliquely orientated" and "furthest away" – isolated and askew (8).

A… should not underestimate, however, the depth of her husband's own relationship with the house, honed as it has been by his need to catch her out in her infidelity. His well-practised, surveyor's eye measures time by the length of the shadows cast by columns and balusters and, when blinds are closed and the consequent dimness compromises his judgement of distance ("lines are just as distinct, but the succession of planes gives no impression of depth"), he knows from experience that "the hands instinctively reach out in front of the body to measure the space more precisely" (39). Careful measuring is only one of the surveillance strategies he has at his disposal. While A… locks her bedroom door against him, he oils the hinges of the office door opposite to ensure that it opens without creaking and "returns to its initial position with the same discretion"; and while she clicks ostentatiously up the corridor in her extraordinarily high heels, and Franck's footsteps "echo over the tiles of the hallway", he creeps in their wake in his rubber-soled shoes (46). His surveillance system is less limited than the one operated by the eagle-eyed Kelways in Bowen's Holme Dene because perception, for Robbe-Grillet, is not the only way of apprehending the world. Memory, projection, and indeed "every form of imagination" are no less valid than the senses as sources of data, as he explains in "New Novel, New Man" (1961), and he allows *Jealousy*'s narrator to use all of them in his struggle with his wife (Robbe-Grillet 1961: 137). His speculations are not randomly conjured by his

imagination, however, like those of the narrator of "The Mark on the Wall". They are based, rather, on what he *might have been able to see*, given a different vantage point.

The perspective of *Jealousy*'s narrator is never as limited as that of his counterparts in "The Yellow Wallpaper", *Hell*, and "The Mark on the Wall" (tethered, respectively, to a bed, a hole and a chair), and he has considerably more room for manoeuvre than Gregor Samsa, but he does not have a cubist's ubiquity. If doors are shut, he cannot see through them, and the quality of his view of the glances exchanged by A… and Franck depends entirely on the position of his chair. In *Out* (1964), a novel by Robbe-Grillet's translator and disciple Christine Brooke-Rose, an anonymous narrator prowls a house much as *Jealousy*'s prowls his. Brooke-Rose equips him with a range of optical devices, including a periscope, a microscope and a teinoscope, but still he finds "it is impossible ever to see whether things are any different round the corner" (Brooke-Rose 1964: 175). In *Jealousy*, too, perspective is not to be denied. Unlike Woolf's narrator who, once she has established her position in her armchair, gives her imagination full rein, Robbe-Grillet's imposes two very strict rules on his. Firstly (apart from one fantasy of A… and Franck in a hotel which, we are told, "everyone knows") he does not allow himself to speculate upon what may be happening beyond the boundaries of his house, and secondly he imagines *only what is architecturally possible* (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 50). When A… and Franck disappear into the darkness of the garden (apparently in response to some sort of signal), he makes no attempt either to follow them or to guess what they may be up to, once he has ascertained that "it is, of course, impossible to see anything, even leaning as far out as possible, the body halfway over the balustrade" (110). Having accepted that architecture gets in the way, he would far rather outwit it than ignore it, which is why he constantly experiments with perspective. On the day of A…'s absence, for example, he sits in Franck's place at the table to see how the world looks from there, then further occupies his time in observing the marks made on the veranda floor by furniture that is not in its normal position. From the office window he confirms the galling proximity of the lovers' chairs: "The flagstones show the trace of eight chair legs: two sets of four shiny points, smoother than the stone around them. The two left-hand corners of the right-hand square are scarcely two inches away from the two right-hand corners of the left-hand square" (65). He also ascertains that these traces are most clearly visible from the balustrade; that "they disappear when the observer comes closer"; and that "looking down from the window immediately above them, it becomes impossible to tell where

they are". This is all data that may prove useful, and he adds it to his mental dossier of potential vantage points.

The 1959 Calder edition of *Jealousy* includes a floor plan such as is conventionally used in crime fiction – a plan that subsequent publishers have incorporated to help the more industrious reader calculate the narrator's position (real or imagined) by following his line of vision. In the introduction to the Oneworld edition Tom McCarthy compares the troubling effect of the narrator's implied subjectivity with "The Shape" in John Carpenter's slasher horror film *Halloween* (1978), in which we are, apparently, behind the psychotic killer's eyes; and also with the entity in David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997), "who stalks a maritally troubled house at night armed with a camera" (McCarthy 2008: II). "When we read that 'it is only at a distance of less than a yard' that the back of A…'s head appears a certain way", says McCarthy: "We realise with a shudder that her jealous husband is creeping up on her from behind". There are more chilling moments even than this, I would argue, which are more easily appreciated if we have the Calder plan to hand. At one point, for example, the narrator is spying on A… in her bedroom, as is his wont:

> Between this first window and the second, there is just room enough for the large wardrobe. A…, who is standing beside it, is therefore visible only from the third window, the one that overlooks the west gable end. It is a mirrored wardrobe. A… is carefully examining her face at close range (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 63-4).

Presumably, then, he is watching her from the third window. What happens next, though, is that she moves into a corner of the room from which she is no longer visible from this window, and the narrator deals with it by envisaging the scene from other potential vantage points:

> It would be easy to observe her from one of the two doors, that of the hallway or that of the bathroom, but the doors are of wood, without blinds that can be seen through. As for the blinds on the three windows, none of them are now arranged so that anything can be seen through them (64).

If, as he now claims, both doors are shut and the blinds over all three windows are also closed, we cannot help but wonder how it was that he was able to see her examining her face in the mirrored wardrobe. The word "now" leaves open the possibility that she has closed the blinds against him, but a careful scrutiny of the Calder plan indicates that it is also possible that he has positioned himself (either actually or in his imagination)

under the bed. If this were the case it would also explain how he was able to see her in the position that immediately precedes the scene in which she looked at her reflection:

> A… is lying fully dressed on the bed. One of her legs rests on the satin spread; the other, bent at the knee, hangs half over the edge. The arm on this side is bent towards the head lying on the bolster. Stretched across the wide bed, the other arm lies out from the body at approximately a forty-five-degree angle. Her face is turned upwards towards the ceiling… (63).

Assuming the ceiling is not his vantage point, the only possible explanation for this view of A… supine is that he is hidden under the bed, looking at her reflected image in the wardrobe door.

The narrator has blind spots – an inevitable consequence of the obstacles architecture throws in his way – and in them A… artfully hides. On one occasion he is watching her at her writing desk through the first bedroom window. Confident that "in her present position […] other sight lines can easily reach her from the veranda, passing through one or another of the three open window recesses", he allows himself to savour the sight of her gleaming brushed hair (96). His view is thwarted, however, when she unexpectedly steps back, so that: "… instead of the hair, there is nothing but the post-office calendar, where the white boat stands out from the grey tint of the wall behind" (97). Like the lizard he has just been watching on one of the veranda columns, "whose intermittent presence results from shifts of positions so sudden that no one could say where it comes from or where it is going when it is no longer visible", A… has dodged out of his field of vision, leaving a blank wall to take her place (96). He is painfully aware that the door that connects the bedroom with the hall is in the blind spot with her, and that this "concealed exit" clears her access "to the hall, the living room, the courtyard and the highway", and "multiplies to infinity her possibilities of escape" (98).

Maddeningly unintimidated by her husband's gaze, A… seems more inclined to be tamed by her own. In one of several scenes where she looks at her reflection:

> …she sits down in front of the dressing table and looks at herself in the oval mirror, motionless, her elbows on the marble top and her hands pressing on each side of her face against the temples. Not one of her features moves, nor the long-lashed eyelids, nor even the pupils at the centre of the green irises (62-3).

A… is "petrified by her own gaze" in a way she never is by the narrator's, and her gaze is a powerful one. Her eyes, which "always seem to be seen from straight on, even when the face is seen in profile", appear to be the one object in the house that is immune to

perspective (106). They are "very large, brilliant, green in colour, fringed with long curving lashes", and she "keeps them as wide as possible in all circumstances, without ever blinking". They get larger and larger, indeed, as the novel progresses, and their focus seems very assured. As the narrator watches her at her writing desk, for example: "the head rises and begins to turn, slowly and steadily, towards the open window", and "the large eyes unblinkingly endure this transition to the direct light of the veranda" (111). At one point he watches her watching from noon to night – first from the veranda, then from the living room, then from the bathroom. He can calculate her line of vision, but the distance it travels is more difficult to gauge. She may be looking toward the plantation, where a native workman sings as he crouches at a stream, or toward the next plantation (for Franck), or beyond, to Africa and Europe. A… is an optical instrument like her husband, but, unlike him, her gaze is directed towards the world.

A… may believe herself to be dominating the battle of the gazes, but in reality the antagonists are fairly evenly matched. There are times, it is true, when she threatens to dazzle him. Watching her at night by the light of the kerosene lamp, for example, he finds when he turns away that her "brightly illuminated profile still clings to the retina":

> The spot is on the wall of the house, on the flagstones, against the empty sky. It is everywhere in the valley, from the garden to the stream and up the opposite slope. It is in the office too, in the bedroom, in the dining room, in the living room, in the courtyard, on the road up to the highway (73-4).

In fact, though, this scene turns out to be both optical illusion (A… has not, actually, "moved an inch"), and jealous fantasy – a fantasy which is dispelled when the narrator registers that "the boy has not come out on the veranda, so he has not brought the lamp, knowing perfectly well that his mistress does not want it" (74). A… is not actually ubiquitous, and neither is her vision panoptic. At one point, for example, she misses an important grimace that passes across Franck's face before being "immediately absorbed […] by the shadow of the hallway" (57). Her perspective is restricted, like her husband's, by architectural dictates. The narrator, meanwhile, catches sight of the grimace from his ostracised chair, and makes a mental note of the gratifying evidence of discord.

Architecturally better informed than A…, the narrator finds some ingenious ways to exploit the house to his perspectival advantage. He notices, for example, that there are slight flaws in the glass of the dining-room windows. As he listens to the suspiciously inane mealtime conversations of A… and Franck, he likes to move his

head, and observe how the banana trees are affected by these flaws. On one occasion he plays ocular games with his rival's truck, so fussily parked in the space allotted to it, enjoying how "the thick glass of the window nicks the body […] with a deep, rounded scallop behind the front wheel", and how "somewhat further down, isolated from the principal mass by a strip of gravel, a half-circle of painted metal is refracted more than a foot and a half from its real location" (50). He further entertains himself by changing the position of the refracted hubcap:

> This aberrant piece can also be moved about as the observer pleases, changing its shape as well as its dimensions: it swells from right to left, shrinks in the opposite direction, becomes a crescent towards the bottom, a complete circle as it moves upwards, or else acquires a fringe (but this is a very limited, almost instantaneous position) of two concentric aureoles. Finally, with larger shifts, it melts into the main surface, or disappears with a sudden contraction.

What he has found is a way of controlling what he sees. In one of the novel's most often repeated scenes, Franck's sedan car, again watched by the narrator from the dining room, draws up in the courtyard after the trip to the port. A… gets out of the car, shuts its door, then stoops back through its window, which "has been rolled down as far as it will go" (60). Unable to see exactly what is happening, and trying to beat back a horrific mental picture of A… kissing Franck behind the rippling curtain of her massed curls, the narrator's hopeful conjecture that she is "probably gathering up the purchases she has just made" is shattered by the sight of the "extremely tiny green cubical package" dangling by a string from her right hand – a package of such extreme tininess that it cannot possibly account for an eighteen-hour shopping trip (60-1). In another version of the same scene, the narrator niftily deals with this setback by moving his head, so that the offending package "immediately vanishes, absorbed by a flaw in the glass" (107). "Reality stays the same" says Franck during a disagreement with A… over the plot of the African romance they are both reading, in a platitude reminiscent of Woolf's narrator's husband when he so brutally rains on her speculative parade by naming the mark on the wall (43). *Jealousy*'s narrator proves Franck wrong, simply by moving his head.

The narrator finds it a great deal more difficult to control what he hears, however, than what he sees. Unlike his counterpart in *Hell*, who has full access to the conversation of the occupants of the next room, his hearing is compromised by architecture. He has, of course, familiarised himself with the optimal eavesdropping

spots in the house, and has calculated potential sound paths as carefully as lines of vision. He knows that "no sound of conversation can be heard from the veranda at the other end of the hallway", for example, and, when he hears the driver singing in the sheds, he punctiliously works out that his voice "must therefore come around the corner occupied by the office and beneath the overhanging roof, which noticeably muffles it, though some sound can cross the room itself through the blinds (on the south façade and the east gable end)" (26, 52). But, like Gregor in *The Metamorphosis*, who constantly worries that his family may be whispering at the kitchen table just outside his earshot, he is tortured by conversations he cannot hear. On one of the occasions when he is spying on A… from the office, he can see that she is "sitting upright & motionless in her armchair", that "she is looking out over the valley in front of them", and that "she is not speaking" (25). Franck, who is "invisible on her left", may also be silent, but it is equally possible that he is "speaking in a very low voice". If he could see him the narrator would know, at least, whether there was anything to hear. As it is, though, the voice is too low to be heard by an ear that is separated from it by a closed window and a half-closed blind. On another occasion his vision is unimpeded because he is on the veranda with them, but still his hearing is questionable. A… passes Franck a cognac while bending over him "so close that their heads touch" (8). The narrator can hear that "he murmurs a few words" in response, but has to guess what they are. His hypothesis that Franck is "probably thanking her" is plausible, but may also be wishful thinking, and running concurrently with it is a nagging suspicion that the words Franck is speaking are rather more intimate. In another version of this same scene, it is made clear that Franck's murmurings have been "drowned out by the deafening racket of the crickets that rises on all sides", a "continuous, ear-splitting sound without variation" that pervades the novel, and is often joined by the equally insidious sound of the kerosene lamp (30, 7). This object, whose ostensible function is to light, serves more often to eclipse sound. Its "plaintive, high-pitched, somewhat nasal" hiss has a "complexity [that] permits it to have overtones at various levels" combined with "an absolute evenness, both muffled and shrill, [that] fills the night and the ears as if it came from nowhere" (79). Like the crickets' incessant chirp, it is a sound "of which the ear is aware only when it tries to hear any other sound" (76). And for the jealous ear, of course, this is most of the time.

Sometimes it is worse for the narrator when the lovers cease speaking. In yet another veranda scene A… hands Franck his drink, and "they look at each other without

adding another word. Franck widens his smile, which wrinkles up the corners of his eyes. He opens his mouth as if he were going to say something, but he doesn't say anything" (23). Non-verbal communication is a new way of excluding the narrator who, "from a point three quarters of the way behind her", is in no position to read his wife's features. During conversational lapses his finely tuned ear is able to pick up "the clink of a little porcelain cup", and even "the sudden buzzing of a beetle", but nothing that may inform him of how they are filling the silence (52). In a nocturnal scene the tiny beetle buzz is joined by "the rustle of a bat's wing" during an unsolicited interruption to the cricket racket (77). This time, though, the couple are absent. They are out in the world, a very long time after he was expecting them back, and the sound he is straining to hear is the sound of Franck's car engine. In another night-time scene (or perhaps in another version of the same scene) the lovers are initially present, but suddenly disappear into the garden with unusual noiselessness. A…, here "supple and silent", must have removed her high heels, and this time it is Franck who is wearing "rubber soles" that "make no noise on the flagstones" (109). The narrator listens from the veranda, but "after a long time, no word has yet been spoken loud enough to be heard at a distance of ten yards". He can deduce nothing from this. It may be that no word has been spoken, or it may be that words spoken were unheard, or, as the narrator is all too aware: "it is also possible that there is no longer anyone in that direction". Beyond the veranda there is nothing but darkness and silence. His senses abandoned, the narrator is overwhelmed by epistemological and ontological doubt.

Worse even that this are the occasions when A… and Franck are speaking freely, and the narrator has full access to their conversation, but still certainty eludes him. In his presence their dialogue is suspiciously vacuous, and their sentences "limit themselves, for the most part, to repeating fragments of those spoken during these last two days, or even before" (51). At dinner A… asks after Christiane's health rather later in the evening than seems natural, and the narrator has a hunch that she "must have asked the same question a little earlier" (28). They seem to be going through the motions – staging their conversation for a cuckold's ears. What the narrator chronically wants to know is *what they would be saying were he not there*. Zahi Zalloua rightly points out that the narrator is not an absence at the heart of the text, as some critics seem to assume. It is Christiane, the empty chair on the veranda, who is absent. The narrator is, on the contrary, a "pure anonymous presence", and his presence is as burdensome to him as it is to the lovers (Zalloua 2008: 16). Like *Hell*'s narrator, he is convinced that

people act honestly only if they believe themselves unobserved. If he is to catch them out he needs to achieve what *Hell*'s narrator achieves – seeming absence, but actual presence – and that is the beauty of the blind.

Robbe-Grillet's blind is more versatile than Barbusse's hole in the wall, or indeed Bowen's blackout blind. There are several to choose from, and "by manipulating the cord at the side" vision and visibility can be conveniently controlled (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 89). The cord is equally accessible to the enemy, of course, and A… makes use of the blind both to resist her husband's gaze and to mask her own. But what particularly pleases the narrator is something to which she seems oblivious – its aesthetic dimension. He likes to look both through it and at it – to admire its function, and also what Roland Barthes, in an essay on Robbe-Grillet's object written before *Jealousy*'s publication, calls its "optical nature" – an aspect of the object which exists neutrally, and separately from its function (Barthes 1954: 14):

> The sixteen slats of a series are continually parallel. When the series is closed, they are pressed one against the other at the edge, overlapping by about half an inch. By pulling the cord down the pitch of the slats is reduced, thus creating a series of openings, whose width progressively increases. When the blinds are open to the maximum, the slats are almost horizontal and show their edges. Then the opposite slope of the valley appears in successive, superimposed strips separated by slightly narrower strips (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 94).

The blind organises the world into neat parallel slices, which is how the narrator likes it. He likes the vertical stripes caused by the balustrade, too, and his favourite view of the garden is through both blind *and* balustrade, which together cut it into a "series of little squares" (27). He likes the symmetrical, the enumerable, the measurable, and the shaped, and shares with *The Fountainhead*'s protagonists a horror of the formless, the indefinite, the overfed and the uncontained. Tangle, bulge and stain are always, for him, unwelcome signs of lack of control. He takes comfort from the regular pattern of the chevrons on the hall floor, from the nautical superstructures on the calendar on A…'s bedroom wall, and from the unambiguous geometries of the plantation as seen from his veranda. It is true that from the living room windows there are areas, less recently planted, where "confusion has gained the ascendancy", but it is a confusion a plantation owner understands, just as he understands that the "slight bulge" that prevents a patch of trees from being a "true trapezoid" is caused by a bend in the stream at that point, and that "the line of separation between the uncultivated zone and the banana

plantation" can never be "entirely straight" (4, 17, 16). The plantation does not require interpretation. It is knowable, predictable, and under his control.

In *Jealousy*, though, illegible texts, easily as impenetrable as the pattern on Gilman's yellow wallpaper, far outnumber the legible. The wrought-iron table at which A… sits in the European photograph is "a metal disc pierced with innumerable holes, the largest of which form a complicated rosette: a series of Ss all starting at the centre, like double-curved spokes of a wheel, and each spiralling at the other end, at the periphery of the disc" (65). As for the chair, it is even "harder to follow its convolutions" because A…, frustratingly, is sitting on it. The song of the driver – "a native tune with incomprehensible words, or even without words" – is equally difficult to grasp (52). Deprived of lyrics to read, the narrator tries to analyse its tune, but "because of the peculiar nature of this kind of melody" it is not an easy task. Like the "sprawling flamboyant patterns" of the yellow wallpaper, which at times exasperate Gilman's narrator with their "everlastingness", and at others "confuse the eye in following" when they "suddenly commit suicide – plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions" (Gilman 1892: 35, 33), it is "difficult to determine" whether *Jealousy*'s song is "interrupted for some fortuitous reason […] or whether the tune has come to its natural conclusion":

> …something seems about to end; everything indicates this – a gradual cadence, tranquillity regained, the feeling that nothing remains to be said – but after the note which should be the last comes another one, without the least break in continuity, with the same ease, then another, and others following, and the hearer supposes himself transported into the heart of the poem…when at that point everything stops without warning (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 52-3).

It is the unpredictability of these texts that the narrators find so exasperating, and their lack of teleology. The chirping of *Jealousy*'s crickets is equally impenetrable. A "continuous grating, without progression or nuance" in which "no beginning can be perceived at any one moment", it has no differentiation, no trajectory, no point (72-3). It "seems to have been going on for ever" (75). But probably what most incenses both narrators is the texts' disrespect for rules. Gilman's wallpaper stands accused of "committing every artistic sin" (Gilman 1892: 33). "I know a little of the principle of design", insists the narrator, "and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alteration, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else I have ever heard of", and *Jealousy*'s narrator's objections to the song are in similar vein (37). It has "no tune, really no melody, no rhythm", and "the sounds, despite apparent repetitions, do

not seem related to any musical law" (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 102). Other patterns prove no less ill-disciplined. Through the flawed dining-room window a spot of oil on the surface of the courtyard "begins growing larger" as he moves his head, "one of its sides bulging to form a rounded protuberance itself larger than the initial object" before "leaving behind it a stalk-shaped appendage which bulges in its turn" (66). An unruly eruption that puts one in mind of the similar bulges and protuberances on the peeling balustrade, it is also reminiscent of the "interminable string of toad-stools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions" on Gilman's wallpaper (Gilman 1892: 41). On the night that A… and Franck fail to return, the narrator watches a swarm of mosquitoes as it circles the kerosene lamp, and at first it seems a more promising read. Unable to distinguish the bodies and wings of the individual insects, he admires the pattern of their collective orbit. "Merely particles in motion, describing more or less flattened ellipses in horizontal planes or at slight angles", although they are "rarely centred on the lamp" and "almost all fly further to one side, right or left, than the other", eventually each insect returns, or another takes its place, "so that it circles with others of its kind in a common, harshly illuminated zone about a yard and a half long" (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 77-8). His hopes of having found evidence of cosmic design, however, are soon dashed. The "general unity" of the swarm has been only apparent, the result of sluggish eyesight that has failed to keep up with the speed of the insects' flight (78). He begins to notice that in fact individual mosquitoes are violently colliding with the glass of the lamp and, falling on the table top, they "wander there, tracing uncertain paths with many detours and problematical objectives" (79). If an insect manages to rejoin the swarm the "whorls it describes" are now "among the more capricious", and include "loops, garlands, sudden ascents and brutal falls, changes of direction, abrupt retracings…" to rival, once again, the writhings and buckings of "The Yellow Wallpaper"'s wayward pattern. The stains, messes and masses that the narrator struggles to interpret throughout *Jealousy* include the "improbable convolutions" of his wife's hair; the "animal, reflection or lost object" on the bed of the muddy stream; the "vague mass" floating in the harbour in the photograph on A…'s bedroom wall; the "debris of unrecognised sections" which is the squashed centipede on the dining-room wall; and the "tiny lines, arcs, crosses, loops, etc." of his wife's letter to Franck, which has been many times written, erased and re-inscribed (28, 95, 82, 29, 88). Perpetually looking for clarity, precision and structure, and perpetually failing to find them, the narrator is well aware he is compulsively over-reading. He would love nothing more

than to be a mosquito in a cloud of mosquitoes, and to be as indifferent as they to any "local crises, arrivals, departures and permutations" (78). It would be as pleasant a rest as the narrator of *Hell* had when he stopped looking through the hole in his wall. It would be a life without grief; a life without jealousy. It is futile to study flotsam and expect to find answers. "Man looks at the world, and the world does not look back at him", as Robbe-Grillet points out in "Nature, Humanism, Tragedy" (Robbe-Grillet 1958: 58). The world exists, but it does not follow that it is intelligible to man.

There are two objects, though, of startling clarity, which the narrator purloins from the drawer of his wife's writing desk. Placing them on the polished dark wood of the desk, for a moment he admires how they demonstrate what Martin Heidegger called the "undistorted presencing of the thing" (Heidegger 1936: 151):

> The eraser is a thin pink disc whose central part is covered by a little tin-plate circle. The razor blade is a flat, polished rectangle, its short sides rounded, and pierced with three holes in a line. The central hole is circular; the two others, one of each side, reproduce precisely, on a much smaller scale, the general shape of the blade – that is, a rectangle with its short sides rounded (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 69).

Erasers and razor blades, however, cannot retain their purity for more than an instant. Things are also "formed matter", to use another Heideggerian phrase, and automatically merge with their function once intercepted by the human eye (Heidegger 1936: 152). A razor blade has various uses, and one of them is erasure.

In *Jealousy* Robbe-Grillet splices scenes together, repeats them with small but crucial differences, tampers with clues, and tantalises with false leads; and any linear narratives (the African novel, for example, and Franck's cover story, told "yard by yard, minute by minute", in a very loud voice, with no revisions or revisitings) are shown to be suspect (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 103). The fractured narrative of the "New Novel", Robbe-Grillet believes, expresses reality more truthfully, and is particularly appropriate for the modern world. I think we should take him at his word, though, when he writes in the "story" section of his essay "On Several Obsolete Notions" (1957):

> …it is wrong to claim that nothing happens any longer in modern novels. Just as we must not assume man's absence on the pretext that the traditional character has disappeared, we must not identify the search for new narrative structures with an attempt to suppress any event, any passion, any adventure (Robbe-Grillet, "On Several Obsolete Notions" 1957: 33).

Robbe-Grillet intends his readers to experiment with *Jealousy*'s sliced scenes, and we should not resist our impulse to organise them chronologically (was this incident before or after the centipede-killing?), taxonomically (does it belong with the centipede-killing scene, the writing scene, the hair-brushing scene or the emerging-from-the car scene?), or hierarchically, by privileging the more likely scenes over the more fanciful. The critics who have maintain that "nothing happens" in *Jealousy* are mistaken, in my view. McCarthy, for example, claims that "only the centipede dies: again and again" (McCarthy 2008: IV), and Bruce Morrissette that there is "no conventional denouement" (Morrissette 1958: 7). Jeremy Lane seems certain that "A… remains both alive" at the end of the novel, "and still sharing a house with her 'husband'" (Lane 2002: 206), and Anne Minor is rather disappointed that "we reach the paroxysm, we lie in wait for the criminal, but nothing happens except the return to the minuscule details and their undecipherable mystery" (Minor 1959: 29). I think what these critics are doing is trying to forget (or deny) how thoroughly aligned their reading is with the consciousness of the narrator. In ignoring the "minuscule details", of which he is so mindful, they are ignoring the evidence of their senses. They are not paying enough attention to the universe as he perceives it. Specifically, they are not paying enough attention to the paintwork.

The first use to which the narrator puts the eraser and the razor blade is the uncovering of his wife's palimpsest:

> The paper is much thinner nevertheless; it has become more translucid, uneven, a little downy. The same razor blade, bent between two fingers to raise the centre of its cutting edge, also serves to shave off the fluff the eraser has made. The back of a fingernail finally smooths down the last roughness (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 69).

Despite his best efforts, though, "there are two short pen strokes [that] have resisted everything", and A…'s writing is as illegible as ever. His next manoeuvre, I suggest, is to *take control of the decoration* ("'There has to be a first time for everything'", as A… and Franck are fond of saying). I suggest that, contrary to Morrissette's contention, the novel has a strong denouement, and it begins fairly near its "beginning" – when A… is sitting in her usual place, the lunch table is laid for three, and Franck fails to turn up. A…, displeased, sits "rigid and silent in her own place", and eats "with an extreme economy of gestures, not turning her head right or left, her eyes squinting slightly, as if she were trying to discover a stain on the bare wall in front of her – where, however,

the immaculate paint offers not the slightest object to her gaze" (36). Because of its position in the novel we assume this scene pre-dates the day on which Franck kills the centipede, but actually, bearing in mind the narrator's extreme vagueness as to whether the incident took place "last week, at the beginning of the month, perhaps the month before, or later", we have no good reason to make this assumption (13). I suggest that what actually happens at this point is that A… *notices the stain has gone*. This amounts to domestic sacrilege. Until now the traces of the squashed centipede have been "perfectly visible" on the bare wall (47). "Nothing has been done to clean off the stain, for fear of spoiling the handsome, dull finish, probably not washable" is the reason given, but it may also be the case, as the narrator suspects, that A… is keeping the smear as a souvenir of her lover's virility. I suggest that the scene that comes between the attempt to erase her writing and this blank-wall moment is the one when the narrator erases the centipede stain. Having given the matter some thought, he decides that "the outline seems indelible. It has no relief, none of the thickness of a dried stain which would come off if scratched at with a fingernail. It looks more like brown ink impregnating the surface layer of the paint" (68). As "this dull-finish paint is much more fragile than the ordinary gloss paint with linseed oil in it which was previously used on the walls of this room", he is in agreement with his wife that washing the wall is impractical. The best solution, he decides: "would be to use an eraser, a hard, fine-grained eraser which would gradually wear down the soiled surface – the typewriter eraser, for instance, which is in the top-left desk drawer". With this he has a measure of success. The "slender traces of bits of legs or antennae come off right away, with the first strokes of the eraser", and the part of the body shaped like a question mark "becomes increasingly vague", and "soon disappears completely". Other parts "require more extensive rubbing", however, and there comes a point when "the hard eraser passing back and forth over the same point does not have much effect". Deciding that "a complementary operation seems in order", he takes the razor blade, now resplendent as a thing of function, and uses it, in combination with the eraser, successfully to remove the mark on the wall.

A…'s response to this manoeuvre comes later in the meal. Her tapering hands have always had a propensity to grasp at knives, and now is no exception. While the roasted bird of the absent Franck remains intact in the middle of the table, she carves the narrator's by "tak[ing] apart the limbs as if she were performing an anatomical demonstration" – for all the world as though she were dismembering a husband (37).

The scenes that properly follow this, I suggest, are the morning scene when A… opens the window and greets the narrator with smiling insolence; then the afternoon scene that finds him luxuriously contemplating a rust-coloured stain on the external wall of her bedroom. In his introduction to *Jealousy* McCarthy declares that ultimately "the only escape route from [the] eternal "'*pressant*', from its simultaneity, its loops and repetitions, would be violence: for the narrator to perpetrate a *crime passionnel* against A… and, by murdering her, free them from the vicious circle of meals, cocktails, hair-combing, spying", and I could not agree more (McCarthy 2008: IV). I think his conclusion that "this does not happen", however, is hasty. He is too ready to believe the narrator when he gives his customary exhaustive description of the "reddish streak" which (depending on one's perspective) starts with the "little round spot on the flagstones" and "increases in size as it rises from the concrete substructure" until it reaches the windowsill, or else "has run down the vertical wall from the right corner of the first window" before petering out on the flagstones (Robbe-Grillet, *Jealousy* 1957: 110). This stain is a pleasingly defined mark, unlike the floating mass, the native song, and A…'s hair, and has a clear teleology. The narrator observes, however, that its "progression is not constant"; that "the imbricated arrangement of the boards intercepts its route by a series of equidistant projections where the liquid spreads out more widely before continuing its ascent"; and that "on the sill itself, the paint has largely flaked off after the streak occurred, eliminating about three quarters of the red trace". The mistakes that McCarthy makes are to accept the narrator's next statement, which is that "the spot has always been there on the wall", and to allow himself to be distracted by the reiterated claim that "for the moment there is no question of repainting anything but the blinds and the balustrade – the latter a bright yellow. That is what A… has decided…" He has forgotten the narrator's favourite pursuit as he sits in his third-person's chair; how we have felt with him the scab-picker's joy in chipping off the baluster's flaking paint – a joy rediscovered when he realises that: "seen from the outside, the open blinds show the unpainted edge of their parallel slats, where tiny scales are half detached here and there, which a fingernail could chip off without difficulty" (95). In peeling the paint from the windowsill he has taken control of the décor, just as Gilman's narrator did when she stripped the wallpaper from her nursery wall. He has erased the evidence of a missing piece of narrative between the early morning window scene and the mid-afternoon close observation of the rust-coloured stain. In this gap, I suggest, a detective turned murderer, wearing rubber-soled shoes

and armed with a razor blade, has avenged the pain of the missing eighteen hours in his victim's narrative by entering her bedroom, and cutting her throat as she peers through the slats of the Venetian blind.

This would not be the first time Robbe-Grillet has aligned our viewpoint with that of a man we suspect of murder. He did it in *The Voyeur* (1955) too, and in that novel, too, it is by no means certain that a murder has actually been committed. At least in *The Voyeur*, though, there is a clear corpse, drowned and mutilated. In *Jealousy*, if my theory is correct, both the murder and the murdered are absent from the text, and the murderer is not telling. Robbe-Grillet's narrator likes to have us believe that he, like Woolf's, is a thinking, viewing, housebound subject who speculates upon the world without acting upon on it. Actually, though, at the point he erases the centipede stain from the dining-room wall he has become a participant. Unable to alter the structure of the house, he has found he can subvert it, by manipulating its fittings and tampering with its surfaces. Unable to locate a coherent narrative in the world that surrounds him, he has found he can create his own – a narrative which he can slip past his wife's vision, and also, apparently, the vision of the author. It is a deconstructive sleight of hand.

Fictional architecture, I suggest, is becoming less and less incontrovertible as the century progresses. Jude Fawley's tragic inability to breach it is matched, ultimately, by that of Gilman's imprisoned narrator, for all her interest in the wall as possible site of subversion. Wharton's and Caird's forward-thinking heroines are unequivocally shut out by their houses' uncompromising doors; and Barbusse's, Woolf's and Kafka's protagonists carefully scrutinise the walls that surround them, then elect to accept their protection. It is Rand (surprisingly, perhaps) who acknowledges, and even recommends, a relaxation in architectural control. She admires the clarity of the skyscraper, and shudders at any prospect of postmodernist confusion, and yet she is at pains to point out, in *The Fountainhead*, the value of a loosening of the man/world divide. Petry, too, applauds the fledgling alliance she sees developing between man and the environment he has so long struggled against. His willingness to make such an alliance, indeed, determines his survival. It is in post-war fiction, however, that architectural dominance really begins to flag. The "surviving" protagonists of the texts analysed in this chapter are Roderick Rodney and Louie Lewis, who accept architecture's influence without hiding behind it; Gilbert Jonas, who eventually emerges from it; and a jealous man who dodges its structures by reading its surfaces.

Robbe-Grillet's bungalow is really quite inert, as a field of battle, when compared with Wharton's drawing room or Petry's apartment block. Its blindness, stasis and neutrality make it easy for narrative to slip quietly past it. The next chapter will see a resumption of this deconstructive trend; but this time the structure caught napping will be the high-rise.

5.

"How can you fight something as concrete, as concretey as this?" Deconstructing the High-Rise

"Whatever else it was", writes Deyan Sudjic in *The Edifice Complex* (2005), a study of the relationship between architecture and power in the twentieth century: "the assault on the twin towers of the World Trade Center, driven by visceral hatred, was a literal acceptance of the iconic power of architecture, and an attempt to destabilize that power even more forcefully through erasure" (Sudjic 2005: 14). The images of structural annihilation that were immediately transmitted around the world powerfully suggested it was global capitalism that was under attack, and this, Sudjic argues, was the intention. A quarter of a century before this event, Charles Jencks opened his seminal *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (1977) with a reproduction of another iconic image of architectural demolition: a photograph of the dynamiting of a Missouri high-rise housing development. Jencks heralded the destruction of the first of Pruitt-Igoe's thirty-three towers as a key moment in twentieth-century cultural history:

> Modern Architecture died in St Louis, Missouri on July 15, 1972 at 3.32 pm (or thereabouts) when the infamous Pruitt-Igoe scheme, or rather several of its slab blocks, were given the final *coup de grace* by dynamite. Previously it had been vandalised, mutilated, and defaced by its black inhabitants, and although millions of dollars were pumped back, trying to keep it alive (fixing the broken elevators, repairing smashed windows, repainting), it was finally put out of its misery. Boom, boom, boom (Jencks 1977: 23).

It is the ironic parenthetical qualifier "(or thereabouts)" that makes this claim so reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's axiom that "on or about December 1910, human character changed" (Woolf 1924: 421). If Woolf's was the announcement of modernism's birth, Jencks's was the announcement of its death. As to what killed Pruitt-Igoe, it was the federal public housing authority who, according to Jencks, ensured it "expired finally and completely", but only after it had been "vandalised, mutilated, and defaced by its black inhabitants"; and also, crucially, only after it had been "flogged to death remorselessly for ten years by critics such as Jane Jacobs" (Jencks 1977: 23). The disgraced structure had been undermined both architecturally and textually, long before its ultimate, very public execution.

It was Le Corbusier's *The Radiant City* (1933), the manifesto for urban planning on which so much post-war reconstruction had been modelled, that Jane Jacobs took to

task in her influential *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961). The book was a direct attack on modernist ideology. Where Le Corbusier insisted that streets were "an obsolete notion" (Le Corbusier 1933: 121), Jacobs countered that they were the city's "most vital organs" (Jacobs 1961: 29); where he boasted his city dweller would cross the threshold of his apartment to find himself in a "cell" so well soundproofed that "even a hermit in the depths of a forest could not be more cut off from other men" (Le Corbusier 1933: 113), she offered "the general street atmosphere of buoyancy, friendliness and good health" of a Boston slum district (Jacobs 1961: 9); where he advocated an architectural clean slate ("We must pull things down, and throw the corpses onto the garbage heap" (Le Corbusier 1933: 96)), she argued that "cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them" (Jacobs 1961: 187); where he celebrated high-rise buildings that "rise up sheer from the ground, clear and glittering, straight and pure, calm and secure" (Le Corbusier 1933: 178), she censured the "fearsome problem of vandalism and scandalous behaviour" in Corbuserian "streets piled up in the sky" (Jacobs 1961: 42-3). The demise of Pruitt-Igoe seemed to establish Jacobs as the victor. In his "Defensible Space" (1972) Oscar Newman, an architect and city planner who "witnessed [Pruitt-Igoe] go to ruin" from his position at St. Louis's Washington University, described the theory of the project:

> The idea was to keep the grounds and the first floor free for community activity. "A river of trees" was to flow under the buildings. Each building was given communal corridors on every third floor to house a laundry, a communal room, and a garbage room that contained a garbage chute (Newman 1972: 10).

… and the actuality:

> The design proved a disaster. Because all the grounds were common and disassociated from the units, residents could not identify with them. The areas proved unsafe. The river of trees soon became a sewer of glass and garbage. The mail-boxes on the ground floor were vandalized. The corridors, lobbies, elevators, and stairs were dangerous places to walk. They became covered and littered with garbage and human waste.

"Another factor" in Pruitt-Igoe's demise, says Jencks in *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture*, was that Pruitt-Igoe "was designed in a purist language at variance with the architectural codes of the inhabitants" (Jencks 1977: 23). Modernist tower blocks were chronically out of step with the late twentieth-century inclination for the "complex", the "contradictory", the mixed, and the participative.

I argued in Chapter 4 that there are limitations to what architecture can do in comparison with art, and particularly in comparison with writing. As the twentieth century progressed architects began to look at writing with a certain wistfulness; and to envy the flexibility that their own discipline seemed to lack. In an essay published in *Architecture and Disjunction* (1996) Bernard Tschumi, a practitioner and theorist associated with the Deconstructivist movement in architecture, describes a meeting he had with Jacques Derrida at which he (Tschumi) hoped "to try to convince him to confront his own work with architecture" (Tschumi 1994: 250). Derrida, he reports, was bemused: "'But how could an architect be interested in deconstruction? After all, deconstruction is anti-form, anti-hierarchy, anti-structure, the opposite of all that architecture stands for'". "'Precisely for that reason'", Tschumi replied. The late twentieth-century sensibility is attracted to the hybrid; the equivocal; the liminal; the "both-and", as Robert Venturi put it, rather than the "either-or" (Venturi 1966: 16). Architecture, in this context, looks less like the embodiment of virile modernity, and more like an encumbrance. Tschumi, like Camus's Rateau, is aware of the shortcomings of his discipline. Architecture is too literal, too tidy, too insistent upon inclusion and exclusion, too inclined to stand lumpishly where it is, a constant reminder of the dichotomy it has created. Writing, by contrast, seems so much lighter on its feet.

In twentieth-century fiction architecture, as I have argued in previous chapters, tends to be an anachronistic form. Petry anticipates Jacobs in demonstrating that a street's viability depends on an ethos of cheerful cooperation which can only be achieved through a relaxation of architectural discipline; and even Rand's steely architect is minded to encourage a yielding of the barriers between inside and out. With the outbreak of the Second World War the authority of fictional architecture rapidly decreased. Bowen's walls are unstable, permeable and ephemeral; Camus's are temporary, and Robbe-Grillet's are easily dodged. Post-war writers are interested in mingling and middles – in traces that blur the distinction between past (or absent) and present; in words that weaken the boundary between solitude and solidarity, and in *jalousies* that subvert the polarity between exposure and concealment. In the twentieth-century dystopian novel, intransigent buildings are figures for the power of the state. In Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), for example, the protagonist's reverential exclamation, "'Oh great, divinely limiting wisdom of walls, of barriers! Perhaps this is the greatest of all inventions!'", demonstrates the extent to which he is in thrall to the One State (Zamyatin 1921: 101); and the citizens of George Orwell's Airstrip One are

similarly awed by the "enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete" and the "maze of barbed-wire entanglements, steel doors and hidden machine-gun nests" that are, respectively, the Ministries of Truth and Love (Orwell 1949: 5-6). Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) takes its revenge on architecture when a bomb (presumably nuclear) reduces an entire city to a "heap of baking powder" (Bradbury 1953: 208).

> For another of those impossible instants the city stood, rebuilt and unrecognizable, taller than it had ever hoped or strived to be, taller than man had built it, erected at last in gouts of shattered concrete and sparkles of torn metal into a mural hung like a reversed avalanche, a million colours, a million oddities, a door where a window should be, a top for a bottom, a side for a back, and then the city rolled over and fell down dead (205).

With architecture so thoroughly routed (and writing internalised in the memories of the survivors to escape the authorities' furnaces), there is now nothing to prevent an ecstatic mingling of protagonist and world:

> "Look at the world out there, my God, my God, look at it out there, outside me, out there beyond my face and the only way to really touch it is to put it where it's finally me, where it's in the blood, where it pumps around a thousand times ten thousand a day. I get hold of it so it'll never run off. I'll hold on to the world tight some day. I've got one finger on it now: that's a beginning" (207).

This chapter will analyse two dystopian novels published in the mid-1970s, one of which – Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) – ends with a similarly spectacular act of architectural demolition. It is of a more metaphysical character, though, which is typical of the novel's attitude to architecture; and Lessing is more sympathetic to the human need for enclosure. Her walls are blankets, as often as they are straitjackets: they limit the infinite, and strengthen the experience of self. Lessing is a great deal kinder to her tower block than J.G. Ballard is to his in *High-Rise* (1975). While hers fragments, then dissipates, the corpse of his is left, at the end of the novel, to decompose. The destiny of both buildings, though, as this chapter will argue, is to succumb to deconstruction.

J. G. Ballard's *High-Rise* (1975)

Ballard's *High-Rise* is a dystopian fable published in what Andrzej Gasiorek designates "the fag-end of post-war welfare statism" – a period in which several thousand high-rises were built in the United Kingdom to house displaced slum-dwellers (Gasiorek 2005: 107). Gasiorek reads the novel as a critique of contemporary reformist housing

policy, and it is true that Ballard's narrator makes full use of the Corbuserian rhetoric in which post-war aspirations for urban regeneration were expressed. Sebastian Groes, however, has recently pointed out that what is more remarkable about *High-Rise* is its prophetic anticipation of the Thatcherite trend (launched in Wandsworth in the 1980s) for converting public housing blocks into gated communities for the upwardly mobile (Groes 2012: 134-5). Ballard's high-rise is a "small vertical city" of forty storeys, in which a thousand apartments are served by an on-site supermarket, junior school, restaurant and private bank (Ballard 1975: 9). It also boasts two swimming pools. With the support of a resident building manager and his assistants, it is corporately owned and administered by two thousand well-to-do, professional tenants whose homogeneity is such that:

> … by the usual financial and educational yardsticks they were probably closer to each other than the members of any conceivable social mix, with the same tastes and attitudes, fads and styles – clearly reflected in the choice of automobiles in the parking-lots that surrounded the high-rise, in the elegant but somehow standardised way in which they furnished their apartments, in the selection of sophisticated foods in the supermarket delicatessen, in the tones of their self-confident voices (10).

These people are the representatives of an autarchic generation, "the first to master a new kind of twentieth-century life" that thrives in "an impersonal steel and concrete landscape" … or so it would appear (36). Dr Robert Laing, one of the high-rise's most recent occupants, has personal reasons for wanting to buy into its principles. Even he, though, has his doubts. Homogeneity may seem to be a sensible rationale for populating a high-rise, and a smooth-running infrastructure would, one would have thought, be mandatory. But freedom from trouble does not necessarily foster a sense of community. The high-rise, served by "air-conditioning conduits, elevators, garbage-disposal chutes and electrical switching systems" that ensure "a never-failing supply of care and attention that a century earlier would have needed an army of tireless servants" (10), is a fine example of the "magnificently disciplined machine" Le Corbusier offers in *The Radiant City* (Le Corbusier 1933: 143). To Laing, however, it is increasingly apparent that its design caters less for "the collective body of tenants" than for "the individual resident in isolation" (Ballard 1975: 10). The high-rise houses a collection of profoundly introverted, alienated individuals.

Shortly after Laing moves in, he is summoned to a party to celebrate the successful sale of the thousandth apartment. The high-rise has accomplished "'full

house'" one neighbour tells him, or, as another puts it with more prescience, "'critical mass'" (15). It is horizontally that the fissile edifice begins to split. It transpires that the tenant body is not as homogenous as it believed, and the principles under which the apartments were allocated are not as egalitarian. In practice, the high-rise is organised according to a capitalist class structure. The building's lower nine floors are occupied by "a 'proletariat' of film technicians, air-hostesses and the like"; the central two-thirds by a middle class of doctors, lawyers, accountants and tax specialists, and the top five floors by an "oligarchy of minor tycoons and entrepreneurs, television actresses and careerist academics" (53). And with height, it seems, comes privilege. The building manager prioritises complaints originating from the upper floors, which also enjoy high-speed elevators, thickly carpeted staircases, and a restaurant so expensive it effectively excludes anyone who lives below the thirtieth floor. Fortified by advantage, the upper-floor tenants have now taken upon themselves the right to dictate when children can have access to the swimming pools and roof garden; and it is only the tenants of the lower floors that *have* children. Upper-floor tenants have pedigree dogs instead, and, because their elevator journeys are longer, they have been allocated the nearest spaces in the car park – a concession that looks like inequity to those who have to walk "considerable distances to and from their cars each day" (24). Children's parties are held in the lower floors, during which parents incite their drunken offspring to throw ice cream from balconies into the open-topped sports cars of their adversaries, who then retaliate by encouraging their dogs to bark in the stairwells and befoul the elevators. It is not long before parents and dog-owners have "polarised the building" (23). The tenants of the middle floors, meanwhile, are "puritan and self-disciplined" or "self-centred but basically docile", depending on whether they are being judged from within or without, and are kept in line by the "subtle patronage" of the upper floors, whose tenants offer a "constantly dangling carrot of friendship and approval" (53). It is when the buffer zone they occupy itself shows signs of splitting that the whole structure – both material and figural – begins to collapse.

What *High-Rise* proposes is that social division is very much more rapid on the vertical plane than the horizontal, contrary to Le Corbusier's hopes, and that its effects are more extreme. Floors provide tangible lines of demarcation that render the three-class structure, based principally on tenants' lines of work, impossible to maintain, and it is not long before class conflict is replaced by inter-floor rivalry. People first lose interest in tenants who live on other floors, then begin to feel unsafe in their company.

Petty squabbles, gossip and jeering develop "the intensity of racial prejudice" and, when a group of tenants moves around the building: "each of them [wears] his floor-level on his face like a badge" (32, 102). Soon even floors lose their authority, and informal clans develop, "based on the architecture of corridors, lobbies and elevators" that themselves break down into "a series of small enclaves, a cluster of three or four isolated apartments" (65, 126). The problem for the topmost floors is that they now lack a social structure to exploit, and eventually they are forced to relinquish control of the building to "solitary hunters who built man-traps in empty apartments or preyed on the unwary in deserted elevator lobbies" (133). And the disintegration of infrastructure is accompanied by a steady shifting in the boundaries of behaviour. When a middle-aged woman from the twenty-eighth floor is knocked unconscious into one of the swimming pools, it is deemed to be "trivial"; and the narrator pronounces "everything within the high-rise […] normal" on the day a seventh-floor radiologist is beaten up in the hairdressing salon (91). The pushing of a jeweller from a fortieth-floor window follows quite naturally from the deliberate drowning of an Afghan hound, and, once these have been accepted as tower-block norm, it is not long before mass murder and cannibalism seem unexceptional.

When Helen Wilder, the wife of the second of Ballard's protagonists, refuses to take their small children swimming because she anticipates a hostile reaction from the upper-floor bathers, her remark that "'I sometimes think it's not really the other residents; it's the building'" is a more literal version of Wilder's own impression that "their real opponent was not the hierarchy of residents in the heights far above them, but the image of the building in their own minds, the multiplying layers of concrete that anchored them to the floor" (46, 58). As Ann Petry demonstrated in *The Street*, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman in all her writing, bricks and mortar have a powerful effect on the human mind, and there is nothing more invincible-looking than a tower block. "How can you fight something as concrete, as concretey, as this?" asks Lynsey Hanley in *Estates* (2007), her account of the rise and fall of social housing in twentieth-century Britain: "You would have to be as strong as nature not to shrink back from it" (Hanley 2007: 39). It has to be said, though, that the inhabitants of Ballard's high-rise have considerably more impact upon their environment that those of Petry's street. They are quick to blame structural failure on design flaws, but increasingly Laing suspects the building is more sinned against than sinning – the victim of negligence, or indeed outright sabotage. Claims that residents deliberately "'overload the master-fuses with

their elaborate stereo-systems and unnecessary appliances: electronic baby-minders because the mothers are too lazy to get out of their easy chairs, special mashers for their children's food …'" seem to be corroborated by the "crop of illicit liaisons" that flourish under cover of the resultant electrical failures (Ballard 1975: 24, 20). Like children whose parents' backs are turned, the residents make full use of lapses in the building's functionality, and they soon get a taste for vandalism. Disposal chutes are deliberately overloaded with old rugs, curtains and furniture; elevators are immobilised; air-conditioning tampered with; and littering escalates from the lobbing of the odd bottle, condom or newspaper from a balcony, through the throwing of dead dogs and excrement down the air shafts, to the wholesale disposal of corpses in the swimming pools.

"There is water in all of these pipes and every faucet is a miraculous fountain; light bursts from the wires and heat circulates in the arteries as in a living body!" rejoices Le Corbusier in *The Radiant City*, but something has gone very wrong with his "machine-to-live-in" (Le Corbusier 1933: 200). To Laing (his name resonant with both a construction engineer and a contemporary reformist psychiatrist), the floors darkened by power failure resemble "dead strata in a fading brain"; and to Wilder (a television producer), the high-rise looks like "a slow-motion newsreel of a town in the Andes being carried down the mountain slopes to its death, the inhabitants still hanging out their washing in the disintegrating gardens, cooking in their kitchens as the walls were pulverised around them" (Ballard 1975: 75, 120). Even Ballard's exalted third protagonist, Anthony Royal (the building's resident architect), has to admit that "this huge building he had helped to design was moribund, its vital functions fading one by one – the water-pressure falling as the pumps faltered, the electrical sub-stations on each floor switching themselves off, the elevators stranded in their shafts" (68). When it begins to secrete a miasma that is a "distillation of all its dead concrete" it becomes clear that it is the occupants that are killing the high-rise, and not the other way round (150).

The more complete the architectural collapse, it seems, the less inclined are the tenants to do anything about it. Wilder is impressed by the message left on the building manager's answering machine that all complaints will be noted for future attention. "'My God'", he exclaims to his wife: "'He's actually going to listen to all these tapes – there must be miles of them'" (57). Her giggling response, however ("'Are you sure? […] Perhaps no one else minds. You're the only one'"), is more typical of the residents'

island mentality. In the architect's penthouse on the fortieth floor, Royal notices that his wife has disconnected their four external telephones and wrapped the cables neatly round their receivers. One only needs internal telephones, after all, to respond to party invitations from one's immediate neighbours. A short while later the payphones in the elevator lobbies are ripped out, "as if the tenants, like Anne and himself, had agreed to shut off any contact with the world outside", and no-one remarks on the sacks of unsorted mail accumulating outside the manager's office (87). Engineers, refuse collectors and even the police are turned away, the suicide-that-might-have-been-a-murder having remained unreported. To keep up appearances the tenants crowd the balconies in their party outfits, so that "anyone seeing this ship of lights would take for granted that the two thousand people on board lived together in a state of corporate euphoria" (92). They continue to shave and don their suits each morning but, as they throw their briefcases in their cars, they look back over their shoulders "as if maintaining a mental lifeline to the building"; and when they get to work they fall asleep at their desks, then make excuses to leave (102). The vital chord between residents and high-rise only strengthens as the atrocities within it multiply, and eventually they stop going to work altogether. No one thinks to take advantage of "the lines of parked cars [that] stretched through the darkness, enough transport to evacuate [them] to a thousand and one destinations" (67). The last inhabitants to feel any desire to escape are the Royals, and Anne goes so far as to pack three suitcases. Her husband looks at them standing ready in the hall, "for a moment hoping that they belonged to someone else", and within hours they have both forgotten that they ever intended to leave (68).

As the weeks pass, the residents' disconnection from the outside world intensifies. Televisions are kept on, but only for the visual stimulus they offer; the volume is always turned down. News, documentaries and dramas seem irrelevant, and "even the commercials, with their concern for the realities of everyday life, were transmissions from another planet" (106). Wilder is making a documentary about the psychological effects of high-rise living, but tenants show less and less interest in taking part. They have their own ciné cameras, and the home movies they record are shown in the high-rise's projection theatre, for internal viewing only. Wilder continues conscientiously to carry his ciné camera around, believing in "the need to make a visual record of what had happened within the apartment building", but eventually even he notices that his "resolve had begun to fade", and soon the camera's role seems "wholly emblematic" (119-20, 156). Just before his death on the roof he looks down at the

thousands of cars parked far below, forming "part of the corroborative detail of a world other than his own", and becomes aware that he still carries the camera in his left hand (164). "He was no longer certain what its function was", however, "or why he had kept it with him for so long". In a world that has turned in on itself, there is not much call for mass media.

There is not much call for capitalism either. Wilder notices that he has "not even bothered to pay his latest salary cheque into his account", and the bank on the tenth floor soon closes for lack of custom (119). The tenants, no longer consumers, forage for food, or manage without. The restaurant closes, and the supermarket stops stocking its shelves on the grounds that there is no demand for goods. "Good taste" loses its meaning, and "convenience" its frame of reference. The domestic equipment that Le Corbusier promised would become "a genuine source of happiness, for happiness is liberty, time saved, freedom from unpleasant tasks" now goes to make up huge, elaborately-packed barricades for keeping strangers out (Le Corbusier 1933: 96). Chairs are handy for hiding behind, as Gregor Samsa established in *The Metamorphosis*, and also for burning – except, that is, for those found on the high-rise's lower floors, which are made of "once-fashionable chromium tubing and undressed leather", and are "useless for anything but sitting on" (Ballard 1975: 149). Laing struggles to remember the original function of washing machines and refrigerators, which seem to serve no purpose but "sucking current" from the electricity supply (though they make good rubbish bins); and the "huge pop-art and abstract-expressionist paintings", initially favoured by the residents, have become as unintelligible as the fridges (100, 64). Both function and form have lost their meaning, and all that remains is structure.

If there is no room for art in the high-rise, there is no room for nature either. Nothing green is to be found amid the "concrete tunnels and geometric forms of the play-sculptures" in Royal's roof garden (80). As for the ornamental lake, it is "at present an empty concrete basin surrounded by parking-lots and construction equipment", but even this is too natural for Laing (8). There is something *unheimlich* about "the absence of any kind of rigid rectilinear structure" that encapsulates "all the hazard of the world beyond the high-rise" – a dangerous world that now includes the development project in which the high-rise stands (104). The project is not quite a gated community, but its situation on a bend of the Thames has ensured that it is as "sharply separated" as Le Corbusier could have wished from the corrupting influence of the "decaying nineteenth-

century terraced houses and empty factories already zoned for reclamation" that lurk disquietingly nearby, and the high-rise residents have always felt a sense of solidarity with the four blocks that share their modernist island (8). They have taken a particularly avuncular interest in the neighbouring building – a fledgling version of their own. As it nears maturity, however, the other high-rise has grown monstrous, and is showing worrying signs of readying itself for attack:

> Laing reached the centre of the parking-lot, only two hundred yards from the neighbouring high-rise, a sealed rectilinear planet whose glassy face he could now see clearly. Almost all the new tenants had moved into their apartments, duplicating to the last curtain fabric and dish-washer those in his own block, but this building seemed remote and threatening. Looking up at the endless tiers of balconies, he felt uneasily like a visitor to a malevolent zoo, where terraces of vertically mounted cages contained creatures of random and ferocious cruelty. A few people leaned on their railings and watched Laing without expression, and he had a sudden image of the two thousand residents springing to their balconies and hurling down at him anything to hand, inundating Laing beneath a pyramid of wine bottles and ashtrays, deodorant aerosols and contraceptive wallets (103).

Laing is no longer on friendly territory, even within the development. As soon as he leaves the building he seems to breathe "the harsh atmosphere of an alien planet", and the bright light reflected from the hundreds of cars "fill[s] the air with knives" (102-3). Daylight sears his vision as it did that of Camus's Meursault, and Jonas. He prefers the inner light of the high-rise, now a reassuring blend of flickering torch beams, flash bulbs and pornographic movies, overlaid with "a faint interior luminosity" exuded by the building itself (145).

Gasiorek observes that Ballard's characters are always "in flight from anything that might disturb the safety of an alienated habitat", always "retreat[ing] from the beckoning light into the darkness of the cave, and this retreat sounds the death-knell of all politics" (Gasiorek 2005: 188). It is the nihilist retreat that Camus's Jonas ultimately transcends, but Ballard's characters show little inclination to follow suit. In 1971 Ballard wrote of the late twentieth century that "social relationships are no longer as important as the individual's relationship with the technological landscape", and it is this post-emotional world that is depicted in *High-Rise* (Ballard 1971: 205). Intersubjectivity is of no interest to the "two thousand inhabitants boxed up into the sky", who wield briefcases and handbags "like the instruments of an over-nervous body armour" when they meet each other in lifts and corridors (Ballard 1975: 50). Sexual acts "separate them

from each other rather than bringing them together", as they did in Barbusse's hotel, and Pangbourne belongs to a "new generation of gynaecologists who never actually touched their patients, let alone delivered a child" (38, 83). Language, both written and spoken, degenerates with the tenants' increasing estrangement. In the early days of the floor wars there is some system to the graffiti (walls, ceilings, carpets and elevators are scrawled with slogans and lists of apartments to be vandalised "like an insane directory" or "lunatic ledger"), but soon the standard of the handwriting declines (119, 102). A creative assortment of "acrostics, palindromes and civilized obscenities" becomes a "colourful but indecipherable mess, not unlike the cheap wallpapers found in the launderettes and travel-agencies which the residents of the high-rise most affected to despise", then a cacography of "lurid characters […] like the priapic figures drawn by cave-dwellers", then finally an "infantile smearing of blood" on the walls (44, 108, 149). As human relationship atrophies, spoken language also begins to lose its signification. Names detach themselves from people, "like an athlete's tie-on numeral blown away in a gust of wind", and words seem to "introduce the wrong set of meanings into everything" (129-30). Finally, language is replaced altogether by a patois of grunts and screams that are "expressions of totally abstracted emotions" – a primitive tongue developed by Pangbourne from birth cries stored on his computer (137).

It is the building, not its inhabitants, that matters most to all three of Ballard's protagonists. Laing, who has moved into a tower block "to get away from all relationships", soon finds that his thoughts are entirely occupied by the high-rise, which he thinks of as "a Pandora's box whose thousand lids were one by one inwardly opening" (8, 35). In love with its self-reliance and its mystery, he also feels responsible for it. It is a sick building after all, and he is a doctor. He monitors the progress of its malaise by "listening to the faintly changing tone" as he turns on his taps, and by taking samples of the "green, algae-stained liquid" they ooze (145). Standing for hours with his hands "pressed against the metal walls of an elevator shaft", he feels the building's "distant spasms" and listens to the "trickles of sound" from the pipes and cables that make up the "huge acoustic system operated by thousands of stops, this dying musical instrument they had once all played together" (146). He is its nurse, tuner, whisperer and lover, and he yearns to be the last man left alive. Alone with the building he would then be "free to roam its floors and concrete galleries, to climb its silent elevator shafts,

to sit by himself in turn on every one of its thousand balconies", like Dave Bowman in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Ellen Ripley in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), or Gregor Samsa in his bedroom/ kingdom (153). As with Gregor's, though, the fantasy gives way to a stronger impulse – the impulse to "build his dwelling-place where he was, with [his] woman in [his] cave in the cliff face" (99). Like Gregor, Laing elects to retreat to his apartment, and take his sister with him; like Gregor, he loses interest in food, and takes comfort in filth and clutter; like Gregor, his vision deteriorates as the outside world retreats from his consciousness. And while Laing builds a huge barricade of furniture to protect his sister, and cultivates a bodily stink that will lure her to his lair, Wilder succumbs to another masculine impulse: to climb a mountain because it is there.

Laing's inclination has always been to appease the high-rise, but Wilder is its tireless antagonist. As a first-floor tenant he is constantly aware of the "immense weight of concrete stacked above him", and also of the building's resident architect, perched in his penthouse on the fortieth floor (48). Wilder's wife wants to move to a higher floor: "to those smarter residential districts somewhere between the 15th and 30th floors, where the corridors were clean and the children would not have to play in the streets, where tolerance and sophistication civilised the air" – to a better neighbourhood, in effect (47). Wilder thinks of himself, however, more as a rebel than a social climber. He likes to park his car provocatively close to the building, and dreams of leading his neighbours in revolt against those "exclusive residents, as high above him in their top-floor redoubts as any feudal lord above a serf" (53). It is pure fantasy, however – Wilder's neighbours "lack any cohesion or self-interest", and would not know what to do with a populist leader – and eventually he decides to scale the building alone. It is an odyssean climb, an "ascent" for which he will need to make full use of his "powerful physique", yet which will be achieved by "guile rather than by brute force" (63). The "summit" is the fortieth floor, and his "base camps" are the apartments of friends on the intervening floors. Most useful of these will be the apartments of female residents with whom he has had affairs, which he relies on to provide the "literal handholds which would carry him on his climb to the roof over the supine bodies of the women he had known" (118). There are obstacles to his progress, of course, as there are in all epic journeys (elevators are broken and staircases blocked, and Wilder does not have a key to the private entrance to the top floors), and his first ascent ends humiliatingly when

he is unceremoniously bundled into a thirty-seventh-floor lift and deposited in the ground-floor lobby.

Throughout, however, Royal sees Wilder as a genuine threat. The architect's position in the high-rise is largely titular, and he fears that the residents, over-impressed by the conspicuous position of his penthouse, have "accepted him a little too readily as their leader" (74). He has enjoyed playing "lord of the manor", but his partnership in the consortium that designed the high-rise was actually bought for him by his rich wife's father, and he does not have the power over the building's infrastructure with which its inhabitants tend to credit him (72). Maimed in an onsite accident, he now feels less royal, and more like the "'fallen angel'" that Wilder has designated him (15). He boosts his image with accessories – a chrome walking cane, an albino Alsatian and a white safari jacket – and wears his blond hair long. Part-sorcerer, part-Nazi medical torturer, he seems always to be "checking that an experiment he had set up had now been concluded" (27). "'I hate to say it, but this place hasn't worked'", remarks his wife, but Royal is not dispirited by the social disintegration they are witnessing (74). He has Le Corbusier's faith in a durable link between architecture and sociology. The "books and blueprints, photographs and drawing-boards" that adorn his office have been rendered obsolete by recent events, but he remains convinced that "a rigid hierarchy of some kind was the key to the elusive success of these huge buildings" (69-70). He is confident that his *laissez-faire* approach will give the people squabbling beneath his feet the space to find a new structure, and thus "a means of escaping into a new life, and a pattern of social organisation that would become the paradigm of all future high-rise blocks" (70). Royal has been fascinated by large structures since childhood, particularly zoos and aviaries, and he now feels a strong affinity with the huge white estuarine gulls that have recently begun to congregate on the roof. It seems to him that they are drawn to his blond hair and white jacket, and also to the "bone-like concrete" of high-rise architecture (85). Assembling on the elevator shafts and water storage tanks, and feeding on the building's refuse, they appear to be "waiting among the cornices of a mausoleum", and Royal likes to think they are waiting, like him, for some kind of final conflict. The gulls seem so much less abject than the Alsatian, whose vulnerability (especially once it has been assaulted in an elevator by disaffected tenants from the lower floors) uncomfortably suggests Royal's own. They would make fitting companions for the descent of the building necessitated by the recent abduction of his

wife by the lower floors, a descent that will dwarf Wilder's climb in its magnificence and ferocity:

> In another twenty minutes he would leave the apartment and make his killing drop down the shafts of the high-rise, murder descending. He wished he could take the birds with him. He could see them diving down the elevator shafts, spiralling through the stairwells to swoop into the corridors. He watched them wheel through the air, listening to their cries as he thought of the violence to come.

In the event, though, the building's "lower depths" threaten him with suffocation, (86). However imperiously he may "wave his cane at the humid air, trying to stir it into life", he feels "crushed by the pressure of all the people above him" (88). Unable to breathe, he is forced to abandon the "killing drop", and return to his penthouse flat.

"The key to life is the lung", announces Le Corbusier in *The Radiant City*: "A man who breathes well is an asset for society" (Le Corbusier 1933: 40). It is the duty of architecture, he argues, to maintain a temperature of 64.4°, and to provide every human lung with a quota of "exact air" that can easily be achieved with a system of "filters, driers, humidifiers, disinfectors. Machines of childish simplicity" (42). Every building should be enveloped in a "neutralising wall" to ensure "a circuit of exact air" which protects its inhabitants from the stale air of the city. Le Corbusier would have been outraged by the shocking ventilatory imbalance to be found in Ballard's malfunctioning high-rise. While Royal presides, like a twentieth-century Zarathustra, over heights no less rarefied for being made of steel and concrete, and communes with a flock of gulls that make perfectly serviceable eagles, Laing languishes in the foetid atmosphere of his apartment in the heart of the building. He is not complaining, of course. Increasingly "refreshed by his own odour […] – his feet and genitalia, the medley of smells that issued from his mouth", he is as confident as any animal with a well-marked territory that his "powerful odours were beacons that would draw [his sister] to him" (Ballard 1975: 104). The stench of rotting food in his disconnected refrigerator is inviting, and his "appetite keen[s]" at the whiff of putrid meat coming from the deserted supermarket (170). Even the smell that he "chose not to investigate too closely" (and which we presume to be corpses) is not without its appeal (147). To Wilder, though, this yielding to bad air is a symptom of capitulation to upper-floor repression. Exasperated by his wife's sleepy surrender to the fug, he agitatedly wrestles

with the air-conditioning, opens windows, and takes cold showers during which he broods on the "distant heights" from which they spring (49):

> Wilder listened to the air humming erratically in the air-conditioning flues behind the shower stall, pumped all the way down from the roof of the building thirty-nine floors above. He watched the water emerge from the tap. This too had made its long descent from the reservoirs on the roof, running down the immense internal wells riven through the apartment block, like icy streams percolating through a subterranean cavern (48).

This is the rarefied domain Wilder intends to wrest from Royal. As he climbs the building he can see "the line of huge birds perched on the balustrades", and feels no doubt that they are "waiting for him to arrive and take command" (130). By the time he arrives at the uppermost floors, however, it is clear that he is inadequately prepared for the climate. The air is "icy" on his skin (he has taken off his clothes to impress the ladies *en route*), and the black poodle he has chosen as his companion is no competition for the arctic Alsatian (161). Royal, meanwhile, proves just as deluded. His plan to "balkanise" then "colonise" the building has backfired, and his alliance with Pangbourne collapsed (91). The "ultimate confrontation" with Wilder, which for him "summed up all the forces in collision within the high-rise", in the event proves something of damp squib (116, 92). His chromium cane is a superior weapon to Wilder's ciné camera, but he has reckoned without the silver pistol that has been donated to his adversary by a housewife on a lower floor. Wilder shoots Royal, who crawls down the stairs to join the other corpses in the swimming pool, leaving his rival to join what appears to be an impromptu hen party on the roof.

The women of *High-Rise* have, until now, seemed every bit as piteous as the dogs. When Wilder first met Helen she was a "bright and self-confident producer's assistant", and was "more than a match for Wilder with her quick tongue" (45). A year in the high-rise, however, has rendered her as withdrawn, passive, vague, lethargic and childlike as Mildred Montag in Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Like Mildred she has succumbed to the soporific influence of her surroundings, and her husband is "unable to think of what he could do to help her" (60). She is so abject, indeed, that when Wilder returns home from work "he half expected to find her in an invalid chair, legs broken and trepan bandage around her shaven head, about to take the last desperate step of lobotomy", and so self-abnegating that, when one day he finds her kneeling before the cooker, he has "the sudden notion that she was trying to hide her small body in the oven

– perhaps cook herself, the ultimate sacrifice for her family" (117-18). Anne Royal has suffered a similar decline. When Royal first met her she was young and wealthy, and he "had taken for granted her absolute self-confidence" (72). Since moving into the high-rise, however, she has become insecure and childlike, and so abstracted it is "as if a large part of her mind had been switched off" (78). She is also pathetically vulnerable to sexual assault by predatory tenants who stalk the corridors downstairs.

As for Alice Frobisher, Laing's sister, for most of the novel she is a beleaguered wife who requires rescuing from a lower floor; then, post-rescue, she becomes "wheedling" and "waspish" as Laing "trie[s] to satisfy her pointless whims" (148). Eventually she falls ill, and spends her time either lying on a mattress in Laing's bedroom, or "wandering half-naked around the apartment, her body shuddering like an over-sensitive seismograph at imperceptible tremors that shook the building" (147). Laing adopts a second woman to keep her company: Eleanor Powell. Formerly a feisty television producer, at the point of her rescue Eleanor is much reduced: her skin has the "blue cyanosed hue" of the dying, and she is feeding herself to her cat (152). But perhaps the most pathetic of all the high-rise's female population is the "neurasthenic young masseuse" (32). One of the building's "vagrants", she spends her time "riding the elevators and wandering the long corridors of the vast building, migrating endlessly in search of change or excitement" (32-3). All is not what it seems, however. What Laing, Wilder, Royal, and the narrator have all failed to notice is that, ever since the beginning of the troubles, the women of the high-rise have been quietly organising themselves against them.

In an interview with Will Self in 1994, Ballard said that the thesis of his recently-published dystopian *Rushing to Paradise* (1994) was "that men are superfluous, there are too many of them, we don't need them any more, or we don't need more than a few" (Self 1995: 365). In the late twentieth century, he went on: "a large number of traditional masculine strengths, in both senses of the term, are no longer needed. The male sex is a rust bowl" (377). *Rushing to Paradise* is set on an island whose male inhabitants gradually die out as they are "treated" by its female doctor. Eventually only one man is left alive, and his role as the island's stud is put in jeopardy by the arrival of another, much younger man. I suggest that *High-Rise* is a forerunner of this rather gynophobic novel, and that Laing's initial impression that the high-rise is an "environment built, not for man, but for man's absence" is more accurate than he realises (Ballard 1975: 25). There are moments in their swoops upward or downward

when the bravado of both Wilder and Royal wavers. To Wilder, for example, it sometimes looks as though his wife is indifferent to his affairs, and he is disconcerted when she befriends his mistresses. He catches her looking disdainfully at his ciné camera "as if it were an elaborate toy", yet she seems aroused by the dust "spurting" from the air-conditioning shafts – which is particularly galling when he himself feels so "rejected" by the building (119, 57, 67). As for the women over whose "supine bodies" he proposed to clamber, at best their sexual responses are unenthusiastic, and at worst they look as though they are waiting for the opportunity to cut his throat (160). Royal has similarly alarming intimations concerning the building's female population. When he meets the jeweller's wife on the roof: "for some reason he was suddenly convinced that she had been responsible for her husband's death, and that at any moment she would seize him and wrestle him over the ledge"; and when his wife joins a commune he feels "daunted" by "the closely-knit group of women", whose eyes watch him when he visits her, "waiting for him to go away" (82, 135). He is not suspicious enough, though, for it to cross his mind to ask the source of the "heavily spiced" meat the women serve him, and the narrator also does not think to query his supposition that it is "dog, presumably" (135). The narrator is similarly credulous when Royal presumes that the "bloody notches, the symbols of a mysterious calligraphy" that cover the roof's ledges and balustrades have been made by the wiping of gull beaks, and also (although the "flesh had been stripped [from them] with a surgeon's skill") when Laing presumes the dozens of mutilated bodies in the swimming pool are "residents who had died of old age or disease and then been attacked by wild dogs" (163, 170-71). And it occurs to neither Laing nor the narrator to investigate the corpses' gender. The narrator is quite happy to assume that, once "the struggle for territory and womenfolk" is over, the three protagonists (having taken down some architectural drawings, laid aside a ciné camera, and buried a doctor's bag) will live happily ever after, with their harems, in atavistic high-rise heaven (89). It is up to the novel's readers to notice what the women are up to behind their backs.

When Wilder leaves his wife to make his epic ascent, she is etiolated and deranged. It is not abandonment, he tells himself, because she will be supported by a group of women from the twenty-ninth floor, whom he has designated the "sisters of sinister charity" (118). When we next see Helen it is only a fortnight later, and yet she is a healthy, strong, vibrant member of Royal's harem on the fortieth floor. Anne Royal is similarly rejuvenated after joining forces with a group of women whose occupation

of the junior school has given her a "previously missing sense of solidarity with the other tenants of the high-rise"; and, when Royal graciously invites her best friend to stay, it transpires that she has already moved her clothes into the penthouse, and is sharing his wife's bed (92). None of the men has noticed that the women do not share their difficulties in getting around the building, and it does not occur to them that perhaps the role of the "neurasthenic" masseuse needs revisiting. I suggest that Wilder's theory, that she is a vagrant riding the elevators in search of excitement, is wide of the mark. It is certainly not how she thinks of herself. To her the elevator is her "private domain", and she boasts that she can take Wilder anywhere. Even he notices that her handling of the controls is "expert" (64). When he leaves her, he imagines her "endlessly climbing the service shafts and freight wells of the high-rise, transits that externalised an odyssey taking place inside her head", but fails to draw the obvious conclusion (65). The masseuse is the high-rise's ferryman, and she is facilitating a female networking that makes the men, as they "crouch together, clubs and spears in hand, hipflasks of whisky pooled at their feet", look a trifle behind the times (127). The women indulge men's primitive masculine displays, keeping their own shotguns and silver pistols hidden from view while they admire their husbands' crossbows of piano wire and arrows made of golf club shafts. They show a good-natured interest in Wilder's exposed penis (which "he would have liked to dress […] in some way, perhaps with a hair-ribbon tied in a floral bow"), and in the lipstick tattoos with which he has decorated his bare chest (128). They serve at Royal's anachronistic dining table, and allow him to believe that he has "won his attempt to dominate the high-rise" (134). They toy with the gynaecologist and his "Neanderthal" language, then dispense with both when they are no longer useful (140). Down in the heart of the building they humour Laing as he forages for the two women who are now "so close that they seemed to be merging into each other" (171). Laing plays a "game" where he imagines that "it was the two women who were in charge, and that they despised him totally", and occasionally he feels a little threatened by the groups of women who come to watch him for a while before moving on (172). The possibility that he is being kept alive for breeding purposes, however, is left to us to conceive.

All three protagonists believe that they are "free[ing] [themselves] from the past" and "creating a new realm" in the high-rise, but actually they are clinging to the trappings of an obsolete masculine code (92, 118). And the women, meanwhile, are busy cleaning. Outside Laing's lair, barely noticed by him, a group of women are

continuously sweeping the corridor; and Wilder is vaguely conscious that "the higher up the apartment building he moved the cleaner were the women" (159). When he arrives at the thirty-seventh floor he is surprised to find that the barricades of furniture and sacks of garbage have been cleared away, and the walls "freshly painted, their white surfaces gleaming in the afternoon sunlight like the entrance to an abattoir" (160-1). Royal is irritated that the blood has been laundered out of his white safari jacket, and that the floors have been freshly swept and the curtains neatly furled, but he draws no conclusions from the change. It is up to us to notice that, like *Jealousy*'s narrator, Ballard's women have surreptitiously taken both decorative and narrative control. While the men have been tending their tattoos, graffiti, bloodstains and body odour, they have discarded their cosmetics, and have taken up their paint brushes. They have adopted the modernist paradigm – whiteness, cleanliness and clarity – to align themselves with the building; and used it as a cover to slip an alternative narrative past the attention of the novel's male protagonists and narrator. In another sleight of hand – gynocentric, this time, as well as deconstructive, the female population has simultaneously adapted to the high-rise, and subverted *High-Rise*.

Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974)

Like the protagonists of Ballard's *High-Rise*, the narrator of Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* lives in one of a cluster of tower blocks in a city that is unnamed, but appears to be London. Built with "private money", there are flowers in its carpeted entrance hall, and no graffiti defaces walls that are "thick, for families who could afford to pay for privacy" (Lessing 1974: 9). Far from being a "vertical street of the poor" it is, like Ballard's high-rise, intended to be "tenanted only by the well-to-do, by the professional and business people" (10). There is an unspecified disaster afflicting the outside world, however, and it has had an impact on the building's social framework. Many have left the city, and the tenants that have replaced them are more diverse. Observing that "in the corridors and halls of the building […] you could meet, as in a street or a market, every sort of person", the narrator is at pains to point out that the newfound heterogeneity has had no adverse effect on the inhabitants' way of life. Compared to Ballard's high-rise, indeed, the building is a model of good behaviour, which proves "order [can] exist in pockets, of space, of time", despite a disintegrating world (19). These capsules of interiority operate beyond the jurisdiction of an

ineffectual city administration in which ordinary people have long since given up participating. “We wanted only to forget it”, says the narrator of the government, and, as for the police force, it is a “shrieking, whining, clanging posse of monsters” that is no more welcome than the one that patrols Ballard’s development project (156). The inhabitants of Ballard’s high-rise pay no attention to televised news bulletins, and in *Memoirs* official sources of news are similarly ignored. People gather information from rumour and gossip, or simply by osmosis; knowledge seems to be “‘in the air’” (12). As time passes, however, it becomes apparent that there is a gap in this nebulous news. The city’s emigrants head north and west because they are in flight from whatever “it” is that is rumoured to be spreading from the south and east, and those that remain have always assumed they would one day follow suit. Now, though, there is a widespread awareness that “there was silence from out there, the places so many people had set off to reach. Silence and cold” (177). It begins to look as though there is nothing to the north and west, in fact, but oblivion.

In Lessing’s dystopia modernity’s systems and structures are increasingly redundant, just as they are in Ballard’s. The city has “warehouses full of electric contrivances no longer useful for anything”, and when the narrator visits a hotel, now occupied by squatters, she remarks that “as a machine the place was useless, like all the complicated buildings which had depended on technicalities” (95, 108). In the early days of the crisis, citizens are “still being incited by advertisements to spend and use and discard”, but as it deepens money loses its value just as rapidly as it does in Ballard’s high-rise (46). Lessing’s economic forecast, however, is considerably more optimistic than Ballard’s. At one point in *High-Rise,* Anthony Royal speculates that in the new world dogs will be a more effective means of exchange than women, and that both will replace money (Ballard 1975: 90). In the event, though, the building’s regression is so absolute that even barter is too sophisticated for its inhabitants to grasp. The barter system that replaces money in *Memoirs,* on the other hand, is very efficient. The “strings and bottles, piles of plastic and polythene pieces […]; bits of metal, wire flex, plastic tape; books and hats and clothes […] umbrellas, artificial flowers, [and] carton[s] full of corks” that would no doubt have been discarded in *High-Rise* (or used to pelt enemies) are enthusiastically embraced as currency in Lessing’s upper-floor market (Lessing 1974: 101). Her juvenile traders readily exchange saucepans, jugs, and scrubbing brushes for the narrator’s “toasters and roasters”, which they then dismantle for parts in a recycling initiative that seems to hold some promise of a future.

It is this sense of promise that is entirely lacking in Ballard's world. Dr Laing, indeed, reflects that: "sometimes he found it difficult not to believe that they were living in a future that had already taken place, and was now exhausted" (Ballard 1975: 147). Prospects seem every bit as bleak in *Memoirs*, and yet Lessing's citizens never quite lose their sense of potential. Ballard's high-rise dwellers see nothing but a soiled car park between themselves and the identical building next door; nothing to attract their attention outwards. The occupants of Lessing's tower block, on the other hand, spend days at a time looking out of their windows at the pavement outside, now a liminal area between their "pockets of space" and the dangerous void. The pavement, bounded on one side by a small parapet and on the other by an old wall, has "become defined, like an arena or a theatre", and here tribes of young people enact an alternative way of life (Lessing 1974: 55). These young people have "relinquished individuality", the narrator observes, to operate as a pack (33). Now "the mass was their home, their place of self-recognition", and they cannot bear to be alone. Even the very young are sexually promiscuous, and would "never shut themselves off in couples behind walls unless it was for a few days or hours in a deserted house somewhere, or a shed in a field" (74). Sex is a matter of "mingling constantly with others" and "exchanging emanations", as it is for Louie Lewis and her airmen in Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*. "War at present worked as a thinning of the membrane between the this and the that […] but then what else is love?" asks Bowen's narrator, and Lessing's is asking much the same question (Bowen 1949: 195). Partly by choice, but mainly through necessity, the younger generation, in both novels, is dispensing with boundary. Lessing's gang is not anarchic, however, fluid though it is. There is an alpha male – a "lord of the pavement", a "chieftain of the gathering tribes", who notices that a dozen of the children are "literally living on the pavement", and decides it is time to organise (Lessing 1974: 178, 83). Gerald moves the children into a large abandoned house with a water supply, where they eat and sleep communally, and (once he has taught them carpentry, horticulture, weaving, candle-making, tanning, food preservation and furniture restoration) become self-sufficient. Gerald's house is a model of collectivism that would have made Ayn Rand turn in her grave, but to Lessing's narrator it is "a great crescendo of joy, of success, of fulfilment, of doing, of making, of being needed" (85). Ultimately it fails, but only just.

There are two reasons, according to the narrator, for the collapse of Gerald's community. The first is its susceptibility to the same snags as other, well-tested

communal experiments. As Emily Cartwright (Gerald's girlfriend and the narrator's unlooked-for foster daughter) puts it: "'It is impossible not to have a pecking order. No matter how you try not to'" (112). The narrator's response to their predicament is sympathetic: "'Everybody has been taught to find a place in a structure – that as a first lesson. To obey. Isn't that so? And so that is what everybody does'". Emily has slotted into her "woman's place", while Gerald wears himself out with hunting and gathering (116). For the narrator it is "stale social patterns" that are the problem (115). It is not possible to make a new start in the stultified structures of an exhausted world; what the world requires is new patterns.

Another near-successful community the novel offers, and one that eventually amalgamates with Gerald's, is the Ryan house. Occupied by a large, unruly family it is, unlike Gerald's house, not blessed with narratorial approval. "It was filthy", she scolds, "and what furniture it had fit for a rubbish dump. Nothing on the bare floors but dirt, a bone, a plate of rancid cat's food" (103). It lacks Gerald's systems: there are no bed-times or meal-times, and no-one is able to hold down a job. The narrator resists, however, the middle-class consensus that the Ryans are "feckless and irresponsible, hopeless, futureless, uneducated and ineducable […] debased and depressed and depraved […] doomed and damned [and] dangerous" (106). She has noticed that their "minute-by-hour life, communal and hugger-mugger, seemed all enjoyment and sensation: they liked being together. They liked each other" – which is more than can be said for many of her friends in their pockets of space. There is a tribe, however, worse than the Ryans: an underclass living literally beneath their feet; and it is this that poses the second threat to Gerald's house. When Gerald rescues a gang of feral children from the city's underground system it is with a view to assimilating it into his community, as he has June Ryan; but it transpires that these children are more truly "doomed, damned and dangerous". As uncivilised as the children in Ballard's high-rise, as malevolent as the former occupants of Gilman's yellow nursery, as irredeemable as H.G. Wells's subterranean Morlocks, they "wrecked everything, tore up the vegetables in the garden, sat at windows throwing filth at passers-by like monkeys. They were drunk; they had taught themselves drunkenness" (150). These are the representatives of a new generation that has "no idea of a house as a machine". Uncontainable by structure, either architectural or social, they lay waste to Gerald's community, and are now loose in what remains of the city.

In *The Radiant City* (1933) Le Corbusier draws repeatedly on medical discourse to lend weight to his campaign for height. Berating man for the inertia that "keeps him so flattened to the ground", he blames him that "the world is sick" (Le Corbusier 1933: 56, 92). It is obvious, he says, that "the natural ground is the dispenser of rheumatisms and tuberculosis", and he reminds his detractors that there is nothing new about wishing to escape it (56). When establishing a village the first thing "savages" do, he points out, is to build "artificial sites (a floor raised above the ground) to avoid floods or scorpions", and he thinks modern city-dwellers are to be congratulated for taking the principle further. Marvelling that "they erect apartment buildings six storeys high! They place six artificial sites one above the other! They equip them with modern utilities, water, gas, electricity; and drains!", he gives vent to his indignation at being branded "a madman" for celebrating modern techniques that make it possible "to perch twenty or thirty or fifty artificial sites on top of one another". The tower block, he says, is the perfect "vertical solution" to slums and suburbs – the twin twentieth-century epidemics he believes to be blighting the horizontal plane (57). *Memoirs,* like *High-Rise,* endorses the Corbuserian claim that health is "up", and disease "down". The narrator's flat is on the ground floor, and she admits to having been always "one of those who looked up, imagining how things might be up there in higher regions where windows admitted a finer air", far from "the sound of traffic, the smells of chemicals and of plant life … the street" (Lessing 1974: 9). Later she ventures to the upper part of the building and finds that, like the pavement, its vacated apartments have been occupied by a community of young people. While the lower floors have continued to live in "quietness [and] sobriety", with "Mr and Mrs Jones and family, Miss Foster and Miss Baxter, Mr and Mrs Smith and Miss Alicia Smith" living snugly in "little self-contained units" behind "doors marked 1, 2, 3", the doors of the upper floors stand open, and their rooms are filled with the "bustle and movement" of a "polyglot", "good-natured" and "orderly" crowd of people involved in collective, purposeful work (98, 101). Tower blocks all over the city have been optimistically restructured to accommodate roof-top market gardens, pens for livestock, and workshops that convert discarded electrical equipment into water purifiers, wind generators and air ionisers. Now, when the narrator looks up to the upper floors, they are "gay and even frivolous" with coloured windmills and solar power devices, and with washing that "danced and dangled" between them on lines made of "timeless string" (109).

The street, on the other hand, is "dusty and as usual littered with paper, cans, every kind of debris" and, as the novel progresses, the narrator is increasingly aware of "how slow and dim and heavy was the air" (108, 160). Hugo, Emily's dog/cat hybrid, develops a cough and stands, "his sides heaving", begging for the narrator to open the window (160). Even when she does so, it is a struggle for them to "flush [their] lungs clean" of the "fug and the heaviness of the room". Worried about Emily, the narrator goes to seek her out in Gerald's devastated house, and finds her holed up in an attic room with an assortment of air-purifying machines. The narrator, who has been slowly suffocating in the ground-floor atmosphere, inhales the cleansed air here in "great gasps" (161). Wrapping herself in Emily's furs, she is "happy to be there, and breathe". Emily agrees to return with her to the flat, on condition that they take Gerald and an air purifier with them. They live reasonably comfortably for a few days (although the handle that recharges the purifier's batteries requires constant turning), but the narrator wakes one morning to find there is no water in the taps, and deduces that "the building, as a machine, was dead" (167). Vulnerable to attack from the "lethal" children, who now occupy the upper floors as well as scurrying "like moles or rats in the earth", they try to reassure themselves that escape would merely "be a question of jumping out of a window", but they can no longer ignore the fact that the air outside, despite the winter snow and wind, has been "getting fouler and thicker for a long time" (167, 146, 161). They have been coping with the atmospheric decline by "taking short reluctant breaths, as if rationing what we took into our lungs […] could also ration the poisons", but the word on the street is that this is "it", again, in a new form, or even "'it', perhaps, in its original form" (161). It is a miasma of decay as noxious as Gilman's yellow smell. The world is dying, having succumbed, as he warned it might, to Le Corbusier's "devil's air" (Le Corbusier 1933: 41).

There is a moment, towards the end of *High-Rise*, when Ballard seems to offer the possibility of deliverance. Beneath the carpet of a ransacked apartment, Laing comes across a manhole that has been carefully drilled through floorboards and concrete. Looking through the hole to the apartment beneath, he finds a room that is surprisingly undisturbed. As he looks down at the "placid scene", he wonders whether he has "accidentally been given a glimpse into a parallel world, where the laws of the high-rise were suspended, a magical domain where these huge buildings were furnished and decorated but never occupied" (Ballard 1975: 152). It is when Laing lowers himself through this hole, and finds not only that the apartment belongs to Eleanor Powell, but

that she is in, and feeding herself to the cat, that we are left in no doubt that Ballard is not going to sanction an alternative universe. In *Memoirs*, on the other hand, a parallel universe is offered from the outset. The narrator begins her memoir with an account of her developing obsession with her living-room wall. Painted white, and most of the time "quite blank and with no depth to it, no promise", it is as inscrutable as any white wall (Lessing 1974: 137). But in the morning sunlight a wallpaper pattern emerges from behind the surface layer of paint, a "half-obliterated" design of flowers, leaves, and birds (14). Like "The Yellow Wallpaper"'s palimpsestic "subpattern" (which also becomes apparent only when "the sun is just so" (Gilman 1892: 36)), this design seems to harbour some sort of female presence, and to suggest an alternative to the world this side of the wall. Lessing's narrator displays none of the hysterical doubts of Gilman's, however, and assures us that that she is not prepared to consign her visions "to the regions of the pathological" (Lessing 1974: 13). She is perfectly well aware, she says, that what actually lies beyond her "commonplace" wall is a much-used communal corridor (14). It is perhaps her confidence in her own sanity that allows her to get round the architectural materiality that is so troublesome to Gilman's narrator. While the latter desperately shreds wallpaper and excavates plaster with her bare hands, the narrator of *Memoirs*, in what Claire Sprague calls "a special leap in Lessing architectonics" (Sprague 1987: 166), effortlessly steps through the "effaced patterns of [her] wallpaper", and finds herself in a different world (Lessing 1974: 86).

The rooms the narrator discovers behind her "ambiguous wall" (67) do not have the stability of the hidden room revealed to Laing in Ballard's *High-Rise,* or of the one that gives the beleaguered characters of his "Billennium" such brief respite (Ballard 1961: 274). On some of her visits they are shabby and disused, and on others paradoxically "empty but furnished", and their dimensions constantly shift and overlap between walls that are "impermanent as theatre sets" (Lessing 1974: 24, 37). It is a *heimlich* interior, however, that repeatedly triggers a feeling of recognition – a nostalgic echo that is only reinforced by the rooms' mercuriality. Remembered houses are rarely unified, after all, as Rainer Rilke points out in a passage from the *Malte Brigge* notebooks that was much admired by Gaston Bachelard:

> Afterwards I never again saw that remarkable house, which at my grandfather's death passed into strange hands. As I recover it in recalling my child-wrought memories, it is no complete building; it is all broken up inside me; here a room, there a room, and here a piece of hallway that does not connect these two rooms but is preserved, as a fragment, by itself. In this way it is all dispersed within

> me […] all that is still in me and will never cease to be in me. It is as though the picture of this house had fallen into me from an infinite height and had shattered against my very ground (Rilke 1910: 30-31).

It seems to Lessing's narrator that the boundary between self and house has thinned along with her living-room wall, and she is now surrounded by her own fragmented memory. It is not as simple as this, however. Although she feels that "every little turn or corner I knew in my bones", she is simultaneously aware that it is Emily's memories that are "being 'run' like a film" behind the "transparent screen" that is her living-room wall; and even this theory has its anomalies (Lessing 1974: 38, 42). Some of the rooms are just as familiar, but have furnishings that are specifically Edwardian and seem, therefore, to belong to the memories of Emily's mother or grandmother – or even one of the narrator's own female progenitors. It is a collective feminine consciousness that inhabits the parallel world, much like the one that haunts the Irish big house in *The Heat of the Day*. Like Stella Rodney, the narrator feels connected to this consciousness, and yet also excluded. The blurring of boundaries between personal histories, like the blurring of individualities in the pavement realm on this side of the wall, is the hallmark of the next generation.

Whatever the narrator finds when she passes through the wall, she invariably feels an intense yearning, a "most vivid expectancy" that is accompanied by an overpowering urge to do the housework (15). Standing on the threshold of the other house she registers the "fallen plaster, the corner of a ceiling stained with damp, [the] dirty or damaged walls", and as she walks through its rooms she decides that everything in them "would have to be replaced or mended or cleaned, for nothing was whole, or fresh" (16, 24). Chairs must be re-upholstered, sofas cleaned, curtains patched, floors scrubbed and walls painted: "room after room after room – there was no end to them, or to the work I had to do" (25). Despite the enormity of the task, and even despite the "poltergeist" that undermines her efforts with as much spite as the infants simultaneously demolishing Gerald's house this side of the wall, there is always "a lightness, a freedom, a feeling of possibility" in the work (39). It is a "rehabilitation of walls [and] furniture" that bears no resemblance to the sinister sweeping, cleaning and whitewashing taking place in *High-Rise*'s peripheral vision, perhaps because it has a spiritual purpose. The narrator is confident that, when she returns to her "ordinary life", the female deity whose presence pervades the parallel world will "walk in and nod approval at the work of cleaning I had done and then perhaps go out to walk in the

garden" (13, 38). "He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation", sang Moses as he led the children of Israel to their deliverance, and Lessing's narrator is similarly inspired (*Exodus* 15:2). Although she always works alone, she has a strong sense that she is participating in a group effort. She does not join the community of people she finds in a room making a mystic patchwork, but she notes the "congratulatory glances" they exchange, and recognises that "there was no competition here, only the soberest and most loving co-operation" (Lessing 1974: 70). The collective's *modus operandi* mirrors the optimistic market on the city side of the wall, but this one is expecting divinity.

There is another space in the parallel universe, which the narrator always finds herself reluctant to enter. Designated the "personal" realm, it is set in opposition to the disordered but promising "impersonal" realm, and is also twinned with the worst spaces this side of the wall. Oppressively tidy, with anachronistically unyielding walls, windows that remain ruthlessly closed, and an atmosphere as hot and unbreathable as the air in the narrator's flat, it is the space of infant memory. Like *The Heat of the Day*'s Holme Dene, this claustrophobic nursery imprisons the individual in her personal history and, like Holme Dene, it is presided over by a monstrous mother. A "large carthorse woman", the mother in *Memoirs* is "taller than anything in the room … almost as high as the ceiling" (128, 40). She is a fluid mother – as likely to be Emily's mother's mother as her mother – but she is always omniscient, oppressive and inescapable (40). Emily, the helpless victim of what the feminist psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow designated in 1978 "the reproduction of mothering" (Chodorow 1978: 39), is dwarfed by a "hard, white clock" that regulates everything from food to affection; by "father's and mother's beds, husband's bed and wife's bed" that overwhelm her with adult sexuality; and by a "smelling bundle" that is the baby brother to whom her parents' affection is summarily transferred (Lessing 1974: 40, 76, 119). In the adjoining "impersonal" realm the busy narrator never loses the knowledge that "one could refuse to clean that room; […] one could walk into another room altogether, choose another scene", but to enter the "personal" realm is to "enter a prison, where nothing could happen but what one saw happening" (39). It forbids alternative action, and shuts the door on spirituality.

Influences that work to disrupt tidiness and containment are welcomed by *Memoirs* in all realms, but only up to a point. Among the most invasive of these

influences, and one that (apart from the odd desiccated potted palm) is not to be found in Ballard's high-rise, is vegetation. In the city this side of the wall the "plants which grew and grew, taking over streets, pavements, the ground floors of buildings, forcing cracks in tarmac, racing up walls" are designated "life" by the narrator, but there is panic in her tone (178). Gerald's "exemplary garden", which has been "planned, prepared, organised, full of good things all for use – potatoes, leeks, onions, cabbages, the lot – and not a weed or a flower in sight", is much more to her taste, and the farm in the Welsh hills of which she dreams (although its north-west location, she knows, makes the dream unrealisable), is similarly well-controlled (114). On one of her visits to the other side of the wall she describes her alarm at the greenery now pushing its way through rotting floorboards: "The smell of growth came up strong from the stuffy old room, and I ran from there, […] leaving that place, or realm, to clean growth and working insects because – I had to" (87). On another occasion, though, she is delighted to find a tidy garden that is nicely enclosed between old brick walls. Its beds are either "neatly filled with greenery" or "raked and ready for planting", and are irrigated by a systematic "network of water channels" (135-6). Nature has been tamed here, and "the feeling of comfort and security [it] gave me is really not describable". The narrator's further discovery that this well-disciplined garden is infinitely multiplied, so that "the food-giving surfaces of the earth [are] doubled, trebled, endless", and are easily enough to "keep the next winter safe for […] the world's people", is particularly reassuring because the "anarchic principle" is now threatening to make both worlds unviable (136, 95). On this side of the wall "leaves were flying everywhere" in the moribund city, and on a visit to the far side the narrator finds Emily frantically sweeping like a "sorcerer's apprentice put to work in a spiteful garden against floods of dying leaves that she could never clean away no matter how hard she tried" (152, 130-1). It is a desperate, unproductive sweeping that bears no relation to the optimistic cleaning enjoyed by the narrator earlier in the novel. Emily's "futile little broom" is no match for the "smothering fall of dead vegetable matter" (117). Dead leaves in *Memoirs* are the detritus of history, both personal and otherwise. Like Hardy's Sue Bridehead, Emily is dogged and overwhelmed by baggage.

The "personal" realm that holds the pre-pubescent Emily captive is characterised by its airlessness, its hardness, and also by its remorseless whiteness:

> White. White shawls and blankets and bedding and pillows. In an interminable plain of white an infant lay buried and unable to feel its arms. It stared at a

> white ceiling. Turning its head it saw a white wall one way and the edge of a white cupboard the other. White enamel. White walls. White wood (117).

The walls of the nursery form the inside of an egg, and eggs in *Memoirs* do not have their conventional positive connotations. They are secure spaces, it is true, and can always be relied upon to fulfil their nurturant duties, but they are also tyrannical, unyielding spaces of confinement. From early in the novel the narrator has a strong sense that her living-room wall is an eggshell, made of "fragile lime", rather than bricks and mortar (14). It is a deceptive boundary that "can be crushed between two fingers", and yet is also "inviolable because of the necessities of the child's time, the precise and accurate time it needs to get itself out of the dark prison". Narrator and child are equally bound by the "hard, white" nursery clock, and can do nothing to accelerate the pre-programmed hatching that is Emily's materialisation in the flat. The narrator's power is just as limited once her charge is this side of the wall. Her role is to wait, and to witness the struggle that is Emily's maturation. Emily is never quite comfortable in the world. She seems to feel the same urge to merge as *The Heat of the Day*'s Stella and Louie, and it is this that draws her to the fluid practices of the pavement crowd. However the impulse to withdraw, as experienced by Bowen's more agoraphobic characters, is equally strong. Having successfully hatched, Emily now forms her own defensive eggshell: a "hard, enamelled presence" that the narrator finds impossible to penetrate, and that leaves her "isolated, alone" (17, 63). Her increasing beauty is a "shell of bright paint" from behind which she watches passers-by, "outlining" them with her criticisms so that "listening to her was to acknowledge the limits we all live inside" (63, 30). As she develops, "chrysalis after chrysalis […] outgrown", her thinning skin gives her the sensitivity to nurture the next generation, but it also leaves her pathetically vulnerable (53). Wherever she goes, she builds nests for herself out of bedclothes or furs. Unlike her pavement peers, she finds dissolving boundaries unsettling, and needs "very much to know what walls, what shelter, she was going to be able to pull around her, like a blanket, for comfort" (18). Like many a second-wave feminist, she frets that her nesting instinct may be "inappropriate", and that she is "to be blamed" for retrogressive "needs which could never be slaked by an embrace on the floorboards of an empty room or in the corner of a field" (75). Emily does not share her companions' disrespect for architecture; she worries about space, and where she should be in it. Moving uneasily between the narrator's flat and Gerald's house, and between Gerald's

house and the pavement, she is "all conflict, all anxiety" and, as she agitatedly approaches maturity in this world, the narrator becomes conscious of Emily's infant version sobbing on the other side of the living-room wall (142). The wall is not tangibly thinning; on the contrary it is in a particularly "uniform, dull, blank" phase (127). Even as she presses her hands against it, "trying everything to make the heavy solidity of the thing go down under the pressure of my will", she knows that "it [is] nonsense". No self-respecting "bridge or door" between worlds will materialise on demand. Her role, once again, is to wait.

As the narrator, Emily, Gerald and Hugo sit with their air purifier in the ground-floor flat, they are conscious that above them "in the great empty building there was no sound" (180). The tower block is now just a shell – infertile, long dead. The other side of the wall, however, is another matter. Ever since Emily's "birth" the narrator has been industriously re-preparing the space from where she came – removing the "accretions of grime" that have been "preventing a living thing from breathing" (58). The rehabilitated house is now a "cleaned-out eggshell", and is ready for a second hatching. The narrator's task, as it turns out, is not to rescue the sobbing infant from the other world, but rather to take the mature Emily back, having salvaged what is valuable from this side. What is wrong with the world – with all worlds – is deference to dualism, and it is this that *Memoirs* seeks first to erode, then explode. The hybrid Hugo is not a "botch of a creature", but a template to be followed in a final unification of anachronistic polarities such as male and female, age and youth, city and country, and birth and death (72). It is not necessary for "this" world and "other" to be so mutually exclusive. Increasingly the narrator feels a "wind [that] blew from one place to the other", and understands that rooms are "part of the stuff and the substance" of other rooms, despite walls' best efforts to separate them (137, 38). In the "other" world walls lose more authority with every visit. Flaking, fragmenting, dwindling, "soar[ing] into boughs" and "los[ing] themselves in leaves", they are the "ghosts of walls, like the flats in a theatre", and are easily subverted (86). On the penultimate visit the "personal" house is made of sugar, and Emily and the narrator eat it with as little reverence as Arabella Donn ate Jude's gingerbread colleges. As its walls dissolve on the tongue, the "personal" directives (that "you are this and this – this is what you have to be, and not that") lose all credibility (81). "In the Garden of Eden there was no architecture", as the architectural theorist Jennifer Bloomer pointed out to an architects' symposium in 1989, and there will be no place for it in Lessing's utopia either (Bloomer 1989: 371). Some

kind of enclosure, however, will be needed to replace the ruined walls. Too much freedom, after all, attracts poltergeists and vicious children. What Lessing is after is a mystical wholeness such as that eventually found by Bachelard in Rilke's remembered house: a "dynamic continuity" where "inside and outside are not abandoned to their geometrical opposition" (Bachelard 1957: 230). When they pass through the living-room wall for the final time, Emily and her companions pick their way through a confusion of architectural fragments and competing vegetation to find a futuristic egg made of iron, but it is not this that will ultimately encircle the new world. Eggs constrict while they protect, as the novel has demonstrated, and must be demolished along with the walls. In a final hatching the iron egg is shattered, and its fragments themselves dematerialise into a vortex. As "the last walls dissolve", the "collapsed little world" is replaced by "another order of world altogether" – a post-structural world that is circumscribed neither by eggshell nor architecture (Lessing 1974: 182). The narrator, Hugo, Gerald, his children, Emily, and even her parents, are all absolved, all protected, by "the hollow of [the] great hand" earlier envisaged by the narrator – a celestial nest where "outside" no longer exists, and "inside" is enclosure without exclusion (87).

Modern architecture was "killed" in fiction, in the seventies, for the same reason as it was "killed" in fact: it was fundamentally out of step with postmodern priorities. Slabs of concrete are even less compatible with community, diversity and cheerful chaos than Jonas's partitions were with "the lovely murmur of humanity" (Camus 1957: 79); and it did not take long for the high-rise – that ultimate "machine for living in" – to outstay its welcome (Le Corbusier 1923: 95). Ballard's exhausted building is still standing at the end of *High-Rise*, but it is moribund; and its deadly female occupants, the only ones to recognise the efficacy of collaboration, are poised, to establish a new world in its carcase. Lessing's eponymous survivor, too, lives on in the carcase of her tower block, but the novel's denouement is considerably more optimistic. The narrator, like the building, is past her prime, and prefers to leave the establishment of a new society to the next generation. She has a role, though, to lead the way to an alternative world in which that new society may flourish, and she performs this role by following the example of a literary predecessor. Like the narrator of Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", she sees potential in *the wall itself*, rather than in what lies beyond it. Like Gilman's narrator, she finds something between its surface and its structure, which she takes the trouble to explore, tease out, and finally inhabit. She survives not by fighting architecture, but by tending it; and the explosion she and her *protégés* witness, at the

end of *Memoirs*, is a much more forgiving affair than the "*coup-de-grace*" witnessed by the bystanders of Pruitt-Igoe's demolition. The utopia the novel ultimately posits is achieved by deconstructing the opposition between inside and outside – a dichotomy which architecture cannot help but actualise. And, in contrast to *High-Rise*'s strikingly irascible denouement, it is a utopia that both genders are "saved" to inhabit.

6.

Sealed Rooms and Yawning Hallways: Marriage and Domestic Architecture in Two Millennial Fictions

This final chapter will focus on two novels published at the turn of the twenty-first century in which architecture, once again, plays a peculiarly prominent role. In both novels a trope re-emerges that has been employed in other texts analysed in this thesis (in Wharton's "The Reckoning", for example, Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" and Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*) – the married couple, at odds, in a house. The feeling of fissure that threatens to overwhelm the twentieth-century sensibility includes self and other, as well as self and universe; and by detaching a couple from its environment, and enclosing it in a house, the author equips himself to explore it. These particular authors, though, as I will demonstrate, go one step further. They place a physical barrier between the husband and the wife – a wall in one case, and a hallway in the other – which must be interrogated, and interpreted, before it can be traversed. As structure, it is the degree of architecture's flexibility that is of interest in these texts; as surface, it is how penetrable it is (and, conversely, how sealable); how inscribable it is (and also how erasable); and, finally, how legible.

In both Chuck Palahniuk's *Diary* (2003) and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000) walls and skin are closely related structures, just as walls and skulls were in Barbusse's *Hell* and Bowen's *The Heat of the Day*. In his *The Book of Skin* (2004) Steven Connor identifies three stages in the cultural history of skin. In the classical and medieval world, he argues, skin was a screen which served to register both physical disease and "the complexion of the soul" (Connor 2004: 26). With the Enlightenment this phase gave way to "a more mechanical conception of the skin as a membrane, concerned principally with the elimination of waste": the preservation of everything that should be inside, and the evacuation of anything that should not. In the third phase – the current one – the skin combines its earlier significations, but has also become an intriguing site in itself. It is now "a place of minglings, a mingling of places" – what the French philosopher Michel Serres calls a "*milieu*" (Serres 2008: 80). In both *Diary* and Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), I will argue, the wall, like skin, continues to perform its traditional function as screen and partition. It also, however, takes on a new role – in defiance of binary opposition – as connective membrane,

communicative surface, and *milieu*. In these novels the wall is more porous, penetrable, and flexible than it seems. In *Diary* it is more inscribable too, and legible, and this enables it to take on the role of mediator, bearing messages from absent to present, unconscious to conscious, husband to wife. In *House of Leaves* it is its *uninscribability*, paradoxically, that renders the wall interpretable; and its new-found elasticity further equips it for its role as agent of reconciliation. The sealability of the wall in *Diary*, meanwhile, permits access to a very select readership: the builder's wife, indeed, is its only intended interpreter. In both novels, though, the wall becomes a conduit, rather than a barrier, which offers to bridge that hitherto unassailable gap (the gap William James termed "the greatest breach in nature") between self and other (James 1890: 235).

My reading of *Diary* will refer back, throughout, to "The Yellow Wallpaper"; and I will argue that Palahniuk, in his novel, is intentionally invoking Gilman's canonical text. A theoretical framework for the chapter will be provided by Steven Connor's work on skin; writing on space and architecture by Georges Perec; writing on text and architecture by Rachel Lichtenstein and Iain Sinclair; manuals of urban exploration by Noël "Whipplesnaith" Symington and Jeff "Ninjalicious" Chapman; and by some of the theorists who appear in *House of Leaves* as characters, as well as references in its footnotes.

Chuck Palahniuk's *Diary* (2003)

The married protagonists of Chuck Palahniuk's *Diary* are separated by an apparently unbridgeable gulf. Misty Marie Wilmot is conscious, and her husband is not. Deep in a coma following what appears to be a narrowly failed suicide attempt, Peter Wilmot has left no note, nor any explanation for his recently acquired habit of sealing up the rooms he was in the process of refurbishing. In an effort to placate his irate victims, Misty decides to see the damage for herself. The homeowners she visits have gone to some effort to find their missing rooms. In the kitchen of one, for example:

> … the yellow wallpaper peels back from a hole near the floor. The floor's yellow tile is covered in newspapers and white plaster dust. Next to the hole's a shopping bag bulging with scraps of busted plasterboard. Ribbons of torn yellow wallpaper curl out of the bag. Yellow dotted with little orange sunflowers (Palahniuk 2003: 52).

When she peers through the hole in the wall Misty discovers the lost breakfast nook is also lined with yellow wallpaper, and covered in her husband's handwriting. *Diary*, I

suggest, is haunted by Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", and the narrator's job, like that of Gilman's protagonist, is to read the writing on the wall.

Walls are not an easy read, in either text. In "The Yellow Wallpaper" the pattern's inconsistencies are a "constant irritant to the normal mind", and a rogue streak maddens its narrator as she struggles to follow it: "round and round and round – round and round and round – it makes me dizzy!" (Gilman 1892: 40, 43). In *Diary* Peter Wilmot's graffiti is no less nauseating. Scrawled in black spray paint, "in a big spiral that starts at the ceiling and spins to the floor, around and around so you have to stand in the center of the room and turn to read it until you're dizzy, until it makes you sick," it is disordered writing, pervasive and hostile (Palahniuk 2003: 27). Gilman's narrator complains of contradictions in her pattern – "You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well underway in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down and tramples upon you" (Gilman 1892: 40-1) – and Misty similarly bewails "the way reading something can be a slap in your face" (Palahniuk 2003: 54). The brutality contained in the "sentence fragments and doodles, the drips and smears" is often directed at her, and she begins to regret that her husband's thoughts have not remained walled up in his clients' kitchens, bathrooms and linen closets (5). She tells all who will listen that Peter's behaviour is normal for a man who works in the building trade. "Carpenters are always writing inside walls", she says:

> It's the same idea every man gets, to write his name and the date before he seals the wall with sheetrock […]. Roofers will write on the decking before they cover it with tar paper and shingles. Framers will write on the sheathing before they cover it with clapboard or stucco. Their name and the date. Some little part of themselves for someone in the future to discover […]. We were here. We built this. A reminder. Call it custom or superstition or feng shui (24).

It is impossible for Misty to deceive herself, however, that Peter's angry slogans are the "kind of sweet homespun immortality" of a builder making his mark, and her efforts to write them off as "crazy talk", "gibberish" or "vandalism" are unconvincing (24, 55, 101, 122). There is method in Peter's madness, and it is one of his victims – a handwriting analyst whose kitchen has gone missing – who insists she take the trouble to interpret it. "Powdered with white plaster dust" from the wall they have just broken through, Angel Delaporte instructs her in graphology – a "bona fide science", he claims, that connects "the physical and the emotional. The body and the mind. The world and the imagination. This world and the next" (29, 51, 54). There is another dualism, too, that graphology can resolve. "If you take your index finger", Angel says: "and trace

someone's handwriting […] just write on top of the written words, you can feel exactly how the writer felt at the time he wrote" (53). Holding her finger so that she can do nothing else, he forces his reluctant pupil to connect with her husband. By reproducing the *process* of writing, as well as reading its product, Misty, he claims, can bridge the yawning fissure between self and self.

Misty, as it happens, already has a close relationship with walls. An acute, indeed pathological awareness of domestic architecture is an enduring consequence of her trailer-park upbringing. From early childhood her "bourgeois daydreams" have inspired her to draw pictures of large houses, each precisely envisioned: "… every room, the carved edge of each fireplace mantel. The pattern in every parquet floor […]. The curve of each light fixture or faucet. Every tile […], every wallpaper pattern. Every shingle and stairway and downspout", and her fantasies have not stopped at surfaces (8-9). Perhaps because her mother works in a fibreglass insulation factory, she is just as intimate with wall cavities, and can reproduce every twist of wiring and plumbing that lies hidden from view. When Peter Wilmot plucks her from art school, marries her, and takes her to Waytansea Island, the drawings she has always taken to be products of her imagination turn out to have been supernatural previsions of reality. The houses that have lodged in her "little white trash heart" now lie before her, and to "a kid who's only ever lived in a house with wheels under it" they look positively palatial (47, 12). But Misty, of course, is as familiar with the "wet secrets of the septic tanks behind each house" as she is with the porches, rolled lawns, stained-glass windows and fluted columns it presents to the world (12). She can see "lead pipes, asbestos, toxic mold, bad wiring. Brain tumors. Time bombs" behind each Greek Revival façade, and it is no surprise to her when closer inspection reveals the peeling paint, sagging gutters, crumbling mortar and mouldy shop fronts of a town that has seen better days (27). Ten years after her marriage the island runs out of money completely, and is forced to open its port to the tourists it despises.

There is a great deal of hidden writing in *Diary* – writing that has been walled up, painted over, pencilled shyly in the margins of library books, or carved discreetly on furniture's more inaccessible surfaces. It is not the writers' intention that their words *never* be read: Peter knows it is only a matter of time before his clients start missing their rooms, and the messages of Misty's dead predecessors were written in wax to coax the paint to flake. What they hope to achieve, by limiting the availability of their writing, is a more discerning readership. In addition to this writing though, and indeed

in opposition to it, is the public writing with which the island attracts the wealthy from the mainland. While Peter's internal graffiti rails against outsiders from his bricked-up rooms, advertising slogans are trumpeted at them from every available surface – car doors, T-shirts and packaging as well as walls, billboards and neon signs – and every day a tractor drags a roller across the sand, re-inscribing logos that have been washed away by the previous tide. Tawdry and seductive, the "corporate graffiti" sucks money in a "dirty flood" from the mainlanders, and will continue to do so until the island can afford once more to cut its ferry service (169, 101). The Waytansea hotel serves a dual purpose. Renovated and reopened to accommodate tourists and serve them tofu, it is simultaneously designed to shut them out. The lobby is lined with green silk, and its carpet is "moss green over granite tile quarried nearby" (94). Chairs are "upholstered into flowering bushes"; the fireplace "could be a campfire", and the blue stair carpet is "a waterfall flowing around landings, cascading down each step" (94-5). Designed ostensibly for outsiders, but actually for insiders, it is an "an island in miniature. Indoors. An Eden" (95). When the time comes for their prophecies to be fulfilled the islanders retreat to the hotel completely, eager for the moment when the drawbridge can be raised against the "siege of awful strangers" that has been occupying its territory for the past ten years (87).

Misty is an outsider herself, of course, and yet her own attitude to the mainlanders is hardly hospitable:

> Part of Misty hates these people who come here, invaders, infidels, crowding in to wreck her way of life, her daughter's childhood. All these outsiders, trailing their failed marriages and stepchildren and drug habits and sleazy ethics and phony status symbols, these aren't the kind of friends Misty wants to give her kid (235).

The external universe, for Misty, is the "hiss and burst" of the sea that constantly whispers its alien presence outside Peter's sealed rooms, and as an artist her ideal milieu would be a darkened chamber (54). She was taught at art school (erroneously, as Cammie Sublette has pointed out in an essay on deliberate historical inaccuracy in Palahniuk's novels (Sublette 2009: 33-4)) that Holbein, Velázquez, Gainsborough and Vermeer sat for days in their *cameras obscura* reproducing the reality from which they preferred to keep their distance, and she dreams of doing the same (Palahniuk 2003: 68). A coastal beauty spot looks to her like "a messier version of the lobby of the Waytansea Hotel", and the landscape she was commissioned to paint there is jettisoned

in favour of a perfectly rendered Hershel Burke Renaissance Revival armchair (106). A later attempt to reproduce the same landscape (this time from memory, in a sealed room) is more successful; but it seems architecture is her true muse, and it soon reasserts itself:

> With a number 4 sable brush, she's wiping a band of gray-white across the meadow. Paving over grass. She's excavating a pit. Sinking a foundation […] the paintbrush kills trees and hauls them away […] plows under the grass. The flowers are gone. White stone walls rise out of the pit. Windows open in the walls. A tower goes up. A dome swells over the center of the building. Stairs run down from the doorways […] Another tower shoots up. Another wing spreads out to cover more of the meadow and push the forest back (147).

Misty is strongly attached to walls. The more inside she is, indeed, the safer she feels. There is much to be said for being locked in at attic room, as Gilman's narrator found, particularly when the grounds for imprisonment are medical. Misty feels pleasantly sealed by the "layers and layers" of gauze the Waytansea doctor winds around the knee he says she has injured, and by the "strips of sterile cloth and clear acrylic resin" in which he then encases her leg (162-3). It is not unpleasant to be "fossilized", "embalmed", or "embedded in amber", like the petrified Early American pears she has seen in the hotel basement (164, 212). With her eyes taped shut, her hands "crusted with dried paint", and Peter's painting smock "stiff and sticking to her arms and breasts", she feels like "an ancient mummy", "an anchoress", or one of the women that (as she has been explaining to Peter's clients) builders seal inside walls "to give [a] building a soul" (173, 164, 166, 186). It is a relief to be insulated from a world that has, of late, shown an alarming propensity to expose itself to her and demand her sympathy. The blessing of a fibreglass cast is that it is thicker than skin. Intended to hobble her, it actually makes her feel cocooned.

In *The Book of Skin* Steven Connor argues that skin, which had been useful to the modern subjectivity as a screen or filter to "block out excitations", became in the late twentieth century an "unreliable boundary between inner and outer conditions" that no longer hid "their frightening, fascinating, intimate contiguity" (Connor 2004: 65). This mixture of fascination and fright, he says, is demonstrated in Salman Rushdie's *The Ground Beneath her Feet* (1999) – a novel that is both "full of the rapture of epidermal rupture" and of "apprehension about [the] failure of skin" (71). The same, I suggest, could be said of *Diary*. Skin, for Misty, is a profoundly unreliable organ – vulnerable and treacherous. Stuck fast to the muscles beneath it, it betrays every

thought, especially to an ex-art student who paid particular attention in "Figure Anatomy 201" (Palahniuk 2003: 3). Misty read Peter's "*levator labii superioris*" ("sneer muscle") long before she read his incontinent walls, and she was all too familiar with the "*orbicularis oris*" that produced his frown. As Brian Dillon said in the preamble to an interview with Connor about *The Book of Skin*: "We live in our skins as if, as we say, they might give us away" (Dillon and Connor 2004). To Misty, certainly, every face is a "diary of wrinkles", and even death does not stop skin "blabbing [its] life story" (Palahniuk 2003: 253, 54). When Angel is found dead his skin cells are "sucked up for DNA testing" by the police forensic vacuum cleaner, and it does not stop there (238). "Everything is a self-portrait", Misty warns her comatose husband: "Your whole drug history's in a strand of your hair. Your fingernails […]. The lining of your stomach is a document. The calluses on your hand tell all your secrets. Your teeth give you away […]. The wrinkles around your mouth and eyes" (137). These days, indeed, Peter's skin barely contains him at all. A "skeleton curled on its side, papier-mâchéd in waxy skin. Mummified in blue-white with dark lightning bolts of veins branching just under the surface", his innards are constantly on view (155). No part of his body is private, and every part is vulnerable to puncture:

> A surgeon implanted a feeding tube in your stomach. You've got a thin tube inserted into your arm to measure blood pressure. It measures oxygen and carbon dioxide in your arteries. You've got another tube inserted into your neck to measure blood pressure in the veins returning to your heart. You've got a catheter. A tube between your lungs and your rib cage drains any fluids that might collect. Little electrodes stuck to your chest monitor your heart. Headphones over your ears send sound waves to stimulate your brain stem. A tube forced down your nose pumps air into you from a respirator. Another tube plugs into your veins, dripping fluids and medication (40).

Peter, in fact, was just as penetrable when he was conscious, and gave every indication that he relished it. When Misty first met him he lifted his unravelling sweater to reveal a rusty brooch that pierced both sweater and bloodstained nipple, and boasted that he "ma[de] a different hole every day" (48). Misty, on the other hand, hates to be reminded that skin is a conduit. As horrified by holes as Antoine Roquentin in Sartre's Nausea (1938), she finds the tourists' "tattoos. Pierced noses. Syringes washed up on the beach. Sticky used condoms in the sand" as objectionable as their litter (15). Her suspicion that her father-in-law is "an old island house with his own rotting interior" is confirmed by the stinking breath that leaks through his mouth, and she is distressed less by the tourists' death than by the unseemly visceral exposure as their corpses are laid out:

"black and crusted, cracked and showing the meat cooked inside, wet and red" (151, 256). People's insides should stay inside, as far as Misty is concerned, and they should be wary of their faces. Every smile is "a contraction of your zygomatic major muscle" she warns, that "pulls your flesh apart. The way cables pull aside a theater curtain, your every smile is an opening night. A premiere. You unveiling yourself" (4). Openings of the flesh serve no purpose but publicity. She tries hard not to leak herself (the single tear that she leaves on Angel's wallpaper as she peers through a hole at his defaced kitchen is a regrettable lapse), and her resistance to penetration (her only orgasm is experienced during a "dry humping" episode on the floor of an art gallery) is similarly self-protective (28, 196). "What they don't teach you in art school is how your whole life can end when you get pregnant", she says, and she speaks from experience (40). Tabbi was conceived when Peter pierced her diaphragm, and this was what trapped her in Waytansea.

Misty is not allowed to languish for long, in anchoritic numbness, in her fifth-floor hotel room. "'Can you feel this?'" Dr Touchet demands, repeatedly, as he injects her, catheterises her, and impales her on the pin of Peter's brooch. He shines a torch up her nose, "the same way Angel Delaporte's flashlight looked into the hole in his dining room wall", and "turns out the office lights while he makes her point a flashlight into her mouth" (126). He swaddles, punctures, or invades her body as he sees fit, and poisons as he medicates. In an essay on freedom and restraint in Palahniuk's novels, Scott Ash has demonstrated that Waytansea is operating a Foucaultian disciplinary system, with a doctor at its head (Ash 2009: 85). Under the baleful gaze of Silas Weir Mitchell, I suggest, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is the victim of a similar system, and Misty's prospects seem as hopeless as those of her *fin-de-siècle* counterpart. The women differ in two important respects, however, and these differences affect the outcomes of their stories. The first is in their relationship with the outside world. By the end of "The Yellow Wallpaper", the narrator's garden walks have long ceased. "I don't like to *look* out of the windows even", she insists: "I don't want to go outside. I won't even if Jennie asks me to" (Gilman 1892: 46-7). A glimpse of Tabbi, on the other hand, apparently resurrected and frolicking on the beach, convinces Misty that she "has to get downstairs. To get outside" (Palahniuk 2003: 217). Gilman's narrator eschews jumping out of the window on the grounds it would be "improper and might be misconstrued" (Gilman 1892: 46) but, in Misty's case, "only the hundred pounds of her cast, her leg embedded in fibreglass, keeps her from pitching out the

window" (Palahniuk 2003: 217). Set the Jungian personality test of describing a sealed white room in three words, she replies: "Temporary. Transitory […]. Confusing", which is her experience of the "deaths" of her husband, daughter and father-in-law (182). Creeping round a room's perimeter holds no attractions for Misty. Unlike Gilman's narrator, escape is on her mind.

Misty shrinks from penetration, and yet is herself an accomplished penetrator, of boundaries of all kinds. Her relationship with Peter, indeed, has been a veritable duel of piercing. She breaks through his doorless walls with an arsenal of kitchen knives and corkscrews, and enjoys the "stab and twist; jab and turn" of her keys as she loots his family's cupboards and closets (31). When she visits him in hospital she repeatedly stabs his unconscious body with his own brooch, whispering "can you feel this?" as she herself has so often been asked; and when hospital staff escort her from his bedside her shout – "'Why the fuck did you get me pregnant?'" – confirms that the piercing is vengeful (41, 158). Dr Touchet is "always ready with a syringe of something if she gets uppity", but he has reckoned without the steak knife she has purloined from her invalid's dinner tray (186). Stabbing and hacking at the fibreglass cast, which now seems more "very small prison" than cocoon, Misty hatches from it like "a butterfly emerging, bloody and tired", or "a bird breaking out of its eggshell" (218-19). Escaping through the door the doctor has forgotten to lock, she heads for the last of Peter's sealed rooms, which is in the hotel. Here she sits among the "curls and shreds of wallpaper" she has stripped from its wall, as Gilman's narrator sat among hers, and reads her husband's final message (228). It is a significant point of connection, and it marks the second crucial difference between *Diary* and "The Yellow Wallpaper". In Gilman's text medical and marital discipline remain implacably aligned, but, in Palahniuk's, Peter defies the wall between the conscious and the unconscious, and allies himself with his wife against the island's xenophobic regime.

It is not Peter's writing, though, that severs the "repeating loop" by which Waytansea has for centuries maintained its insularity (207). It is Misty's. Habitually reticent, she has repeatedly advised Peter to "skim over" the diary she has been writing, under duress, for him to read when he wakes from his coma (40). She is as suspicious of diaries as she is of all leaks, and with good reason. Her mother-in-law is reading her diary, and keeping a rival diary of her own. Grace Wilmot's diary is, bewilderingly, both the diary of Misty's former incarnations and a "kind of sick fiction […] patterned after Misty's life" (232). The islanders are reading it, while simultaneously writing it,

to predict and shape her future. Writing is at the heart of the disciplinary system, and it is a weapon that Misty turns against them. "What poor dull Misty Marie Wilmot has to do", she decides, is "hide her story in plain sight […] hide it everywhere in the world" (259). Her diary must be more than the "we were here" slogans left by carpenters in walls, and must not be bricked up. Ash misses the point when he concludes that Misty's flight to a Tecumseh trailer park is "not really an escape of any consequence" because "the system she's escaped has not been destroyed by her previous actions" (Ash 2009: 86). It is her *subsequent* action that will destroy the Waytansea system, by exposing it. *Diary* ends with a letter, addressed to "Mr Palahniuk" from Tecumseh Lake, and the "manuscript enclosed" is, presumably, Misty's diary (Palahniuk 2003: 261). At the end of "The Yellow Wallpaper" the narrator remains sealed in her room with her husband, but her diary (via Gilman) is demonstrably released to the world; and Palahniuk's *Diary* is evidence of a similar breakthrough. Sick rooms and islands are strong structures, but writing, ultimately, is stronger than either.

Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000)

At the beginning of the documentary film that lies at the heart of Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, its protagonists move to a small Virginian heritage house, where they hope to repair their failing relationship. For eleven years Will Navidson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning war photographer, has spent more time in dangerous locations abroad than he has spent at home, while Karen Green, a successful fashion model, has consoled herself with a series of lovers. The agreement they have reached – that she relinquish the lovers and he his "professional habits" – seems more achievable in the quaint, rural environment of Ash Tree Lane than it did amid the distractions of New York (Danielewski 2000: 10). Reluctant to abandon his career entirely, Navidson has accepted a Guggenheim Fellowship to enable him to record a video diary of the family's relocation. The film will be a surprise to his established audience, of course. There will be "'no gunfire, famine, or flies'", as he observes to a surveillance camera while sipping lemonade on his front porch: "'just lots of toothpaste, gardening and people stuff'" (8). The film's subject, as well as its object, will be marital reconciliation. After two months of "unrolling pale blue oriental rugs, arranging and rearranging furniture, unpacking crates, replacing light bulbs and hanging pictures", however, it begins to be apparent that the house itself is disinclined for stability (9). The family goes to Seattle for a week,

and returns to find an empty space has appeared between the master bedroom and the children's room.

Clearly demarcated by two white doors with glass knobs, the unaccountable room resembles a walk-in closet, but lacks its standard accoutrements. Calling to mind one of the "phantasmagoric conceptions" of Edgar Allan Poe's hyperesthesic Roderick Usher ("the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device" (Poe 1839: 117)), the space has no "outlets, sockets, switches, shelves, a rod on which to hang things, [n]or even some decorative molding" (Danielewski 2000: 28). It is not just its unexplained arrival that makes the Navidsons' new space so uncanny, and not just its emptiness; it is its total functionlessness. In one of the meditations in his "Species of Spaces" (1974) Georges Perec, the French novelist and essayist, describes how he once endeavoured to envisage, in his apartment, "a space without a use", that "serve[s] for nothing, relate[s] to nothing" (Perec 1974: 33). "For all my efforts", he writes: "I found it impossible to follow this idea through to the end. Language itself, seemingly, proved unsuited to describing this nothing, this void, as if we could only speak of what is full, useful, and functional". Perec's space is *not* a void, of course: to qualify as a space, in an apartment, it must have walls, a floor, and a ceiling to distinguish it from other spaces. But the task he has set himself is to conceive "neither the unusable nor the unused, but the useless", and he cannot find a way "to expel functions, rhythms, habits, […] to expel necessity" from a room (34). The "functions, rhythms and habits" of the Navidsons' closet are the sockets, switches and shelves that, were they present, would suggest it is a space either inhabited or habitable; and the "rod on which to hang things", did it exist, would be the "necessity" (or, at least, the expectation) that would refine its spatial status. As it is, the space has no past, and no future; and there is something psychologically unsustainable about it. If the sculptor Rachel Whiteread were to cast it, there would be no traces; it is not so much a void, as a blank.

The Navidsons are at a loss to explain their unexpected extension. Photographs of the house prove they have not spent two months simply *overlooking* one of their rooms; and, while architectural blueprints confirm the existence of a "strange crawl space", it bears no resemblance to this fully-fledged closet (Danielewski 2000: 29). Suggestions that intruders have either constructed or uncovered it are quickly discounted (partly because none of the cameras' motion sensors have been triggered, and partly because there seems no plausible motive), and in the circumstances the

response of the local sheriff – "'Better I guess t'have been a victim of a crazy carpenter than some robber'" – seems not unreasonable. But then a second room emerges, dark and cold, in the living room's north wall – an "impossible hallway" that should, but does not, occupy the space taken up by the neatly trimmed lawn (4). At this point Navidson enlists the help of his twin brother Tom, and between them they painstakingly measure the house, both inside and out. When none of their figures add up, they try to convince themselves that "the problem must lie with their measuring techniques or with some unseen mitigating factor: air temperature, mis-calibrated instruments, warped floors, something, anything", but eventually they are forced to concede that the house is, in fact, bigger on the inside than it is on the outside (32). And meanwhile the rift between Navidson and Karen yawns ever wider, as if in sympathy with their expanding hallway.

The narrator of Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* is unruffled, intrigued, even excited by the rooms that share space with the corridor on the other side of her living-room wall. The same cannot be said for Karen. The extra-spatial spaces that have appeared in her house are not yet "exactly sinister or even threatening", but they are troubling (28). When she invites a friend to the house to help her put up shelves she describes it as building a "'stronghold'" for her books (34). She feels they need protecting from architectural caprice, and there are, after all, "'no better book ends than two walls'". Her scream at the discovery, some days later, that a full foot now separates shelf-edge and wall is a scream of fear, and also of betrayal. She can no longer rely on houses to stand firm, or to provide the structure they have, up to now, guaranteed. In an effort to "introduc[e] normalcy", she accumulates feng shui objects; then, when the house "'still keeps throwing off this awful energy'", threatens it with "'a psychic. Or an exorcist. Or a really good real-estate agent'" (37, 74-5). And it is not just its spookiness with which she is in dispute. In *Practicalities* ("as translated by Barbara Bray […], New York: Grove, 1990, p. 42" *House of Leaves*'s "editors" claim with, on this occasion, impeccable accuracy) Marguerite Duras defines a house as "a place specially meant for putting children and men in so as to restrict their waywardness and distract them from the longing for adventure and escape they've had since time began" (651). This is certainly how Karen has always thought of the house on Ash Tree Lane, but now, it seems, it is intent on sabotaging the marital plan. At best the hallway has the allure of a potting shed; at worst, as Finn Fordham has argued in an essay on *katabasis* in *House of Leaves*, the macho glamour of an underworld (Fordham 2011:

34). Either way, it threatens to distract Navidson from his promise to "curb [his] risk-lust and give domesticity a real shot" (Danielewski 2000: 82). When he, his brother and friends gather in the living room to plan an exploratory expedition, Karen "angrily withdraws to the periphery of the house" (91). She has no power over Tom and the friends, but she warns her husband she will leave if he enters the *unheimlich* hallway, and take their children with her.

While Karen's instinct is to "keep close to the homestead" as she struggles to domesticate it, Navidson finds himself "constantly itching to leave his family for that place" (37, 82). He is a red-blooded photojournalist, after all, and it goes against the grain to leave unexplored an abyss that has materialised at the heart of his house. Without Karen's knowledge he conducts a solo reconnaissance (appearing in *The Navidson Record* as "Exploration A") during which he discovers a maze of rooms that "slid[e] on and on and on, spawning one space after another, a constant stream of corners and walls" before opening out into a chamber so vast he can discern neither walls nor ceiling (64). "Only now do we begin to see how big Navidson's house really is", observes the film's commentator Zampanò, and it is its size that forces its owner to concede that he must leave others to explore it. Shackled by conjugal compromise, Navidson mans the radio from the safety of his living room, while four expeditions are captained by one Holloway Roberts: a professional explorer who is accompanied by two research assistants, a rifle, and a covetable supply of survival equipment. It is torture for Navidson to hear that the vast chamber he discovered on Exploration A is but an anteroom to a chamber that dwarfs it; that in the centre of this "immense, incomprehensible space" is a flight of stairs of apparently infinite depth, and that Holloway has christened his discoveries the "Great Hall" and the "Spiral Staircase" (155, 85). It feels, says "Fannie Lamkins" (a radio psychologist apparently consulted by Zampanò), as though he has been "deprived of the right to name what he inherently understands as his own" (85). Mercifully, however, "Exploration #4" sees an end to his misery. Tents, sleeping bags, thermal blankets, chemical heat packs, supplies of food and water, first-aid kits, neon markers, lightsticks of varying intensity, spools of fishing line, flares, flash lights and compasses prove no defence against a bottomless pit, and Holloway and his team first lose radio contact, then fail to return. At this point Karen relents, and allows the Navidson brothers, together with their friend Billy Reston, to set out, "joyful, even euphoric", on a mission of rescue (153).

Things go wrong, for Holloway, partly because of his over-reliance on the paraphernalia of exploration (compasses fail in the direction-defying hallway, for example, and its constant shifts render it unmappable), and partly because his explorer's temperament ill equips him for evaluating such a structure. Like Richard Wilder in Ballard's *High-Rise*, he is pathologically goal-orientated, and anachronistically fixated on an absolute cause. Once he has found the bottom of the staircase, he develops an obsession with the house as labyrinth; and when he fails to find an exterior, he goes off in search of a centre – and preferably one that contains some sort of minotaur. Navidson has concluded that the "inimitable growl like calving glaciers" that seems to inhabit the hallway is caused by its shifting walls (123); and we wonder if the house is haunted by the ghastly "screaming or grating sound" that pervades the House of Usher (which transpires to be Madeline slowly raising her coffin lid) (Poe 1839: 26). Holloway, however, is convinced the sound has an animal source. Driven to insanity by his overweening thirst for "something concrete to pursue", he runs amok with his rifle, shoots one of his assistants, then finally himself; and it is not just Holloway who is preoccupied with teleology (Danielewski 2000: 124). Everyone connected with Navidson's house is looking for answers – ways to describe it, define it, explain it, or interpret it. While Holloway's team is principally interested in its function ("Perhaps it serves a funereal purpose? Conceals a secret? Protects something? Imprisons or hides some kind of monster? Or, for that matter, imprisons or hides an innocent?"), Zampanò devotes himself to researching possible architectural influences (111). He presents his findings in footnotes 146 and 147, which span fifteen pages and are composed of a catalogue of twentieth-century architectural styles that do not "even remotely resemble" that of the Navidson house ("Post-Modern, Late-Modern, Brutalism, Neo-Expressionism, Wrightian, The New Formalism […], Art Deco, the Pueblo Style, the Spanish Colonial, to name but a few"); a list of buildings that are examples of these styles but with which the house shares no features; and a list of twentieth-century architects who have built a range of structures with which the house also has nothing in common (120-135). "Exhibit One" is an appendix that indicates Zampanò intended to extend his thesis by including "pictorial examples of architecture ranging from early Egyptian, Mycenaean, Greek, and Roman to Gothic, early Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical, and the present", together with "a timeline indicating general dates of origin for developing styles" that would, no doubt, have further illustrated how

impervious the Navidson House is to influence (530). Sadly, though, death has interrupted his scholarly efforts.

Four months after Karen finally leaves the Navidson house, she captures the more erudite attempts to explain it in a video of recorded interviews entitled "What Some Have Thought". Some of the specialists she consults define it according to its attributes. "Kiki Smith, figurative artist" for example, says it is "'texture'"; "Harold Bloom, critic" declares it "'*unheimlich*, of course'", and "Stephen King, novelist" "'pretty darn scary'" (364). In an effort to improve the calibre of her experts' answers, Karen tries varying her questions. In response to an enquiry about the structural feasibility of the house, "Douglas R. Hofstadter, computer and cognitive science professor at Indiana University" suggests Zeno's paradox may be applicable, but fails to explain how. Asked the same question, "Jennifer Antipala, architect and structural engineer" does her best to calculate the weight that the load-bearing walls are expected to bear:

> P equals one half beta times V squared times C times G, uh, uh, uh, that's it, that's it, yeah that's it, or something like that, where P is wind pressure on the structure's surface … or do I have to go someplace else, look at wall bending or wall stresses, axial and lateral forces, but if we're not talking wind, what from then and how? How implemented? How offset? And I'm talking now about weight disbursement, some serious loading's going on there … I mean anything that big has got to weigh a lot. And I mean at the very least a lot-lot. So I keep asking myself: how am I going to carry that weight? And I really don't have a clue. So I start looking for another angle (357).

"Steve Wozniak, inventor and philanthropist" is, like Holloway, intrigued by the house's function ("'If only I could see the floor plan then I could tell you if it's for something sexy or just a piece of hardware – like a cosmic toaster or blender'"), while others are more concerned with its symbolic significance (365). "Camille Paglia, critic", for example, describes it as "'the feminine void'", and "Jacques Derrida, French Philosopher" dubs it "'the other. [Pause] Or what other, which is to say then, the same thing. The other, no other. You see?'" (364-5). "Byron Baleworth, British Playwright" (who does not exist, beyond the novel's pages) argues for the house as "'semiotic dilemma'" (356). "'Just as a nasty virus resists the body's immune system'", he says: "'so your symbol – the house – resists interpretation'". "Stephen King", on the other hand, questions the value of a semiotic approach: "'Symbols shmimbols. Sure they're important but … Well look at Ahab's whale. Now there's a great symbol. Some say it stands for god, meaning, and purpose. Others say it stands for purposelessness and the

void. But what we sometimes forget is that Ahab's whale was also just a whale'" (361). Antipala extricates herself from her logical quagmire by concluding that "'the whole thing's just a hopeless, structural impossibility'", and therefore that "'despite its weight, its magnitude, its mass … in the end it adds up to nothing'", but "Harvey Weinstein" is perhaps more accurate when he concludes, in an article for "*Gentleman's Quarterly*": "It is what it is" (7). Like Melville's white whale, the Navidson house is not nothing, may be everything, and is also just a house.

When Navidson leaves the house, he too searches for an academic solution to his architectural conundrum. Unlike Karen, though, he is in a position to present his experts with "objective data", gathered from the wall samples collected by the survivors of "Exploration #4" (371). His film of the laboratory where these samples are analysed is a "panegyric upon modern chemistry" to rival the one that captivated Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (Shelley 1818: 30):

> In lush colour, Navidson captures those time-honoured representations of science: test tubes bubbling with boric acid, reams of computer paper bearing the black-ink weight of analysis, electronic microscopes resurrecting universes out of dust, and mass-spectrometers with retractable Faradays and stationary Balzers humming in some dim approximation of life (Danielewski 2000: 371).

It is all show, however. It seems to Navidson that science *must* explain the world, but the geological community is bewildered by the results of his analysis when they are published by a respected Princeton petrologist some four months later; and when Zampanò trawls through the scientific journals in search of hypotheses about the wall matter's source, he finds they range from "Antarctica" to "some other dimension" (378). And if "the language of objectivity can never adequately address the reality of that place on Ash Tree Lane", as Zampanò ruefully concludes, psychological discourse fares not much better (378-9). Addressing the walls' mercuriality, some suggest it may simply be a matter of cognitive relativism. It is a common enough experience, after all, for places to seem smaller on subsequent visits than they do on the first. "Knowledge is hot water on wool", as Zampanò puts it: "it shrinks time and space" (167). In the case of the Navidson house, though, there is no guarantee the space will not be *larger* on a subsequent visit, or indeed for a subsequent visitor. A bolder theory is that the rooms are created by the states of mind of those who enter them. The house may be psychotropic, like the houses in J.G. Ballard's collection of short stories *Vermilion Sands* (1971). Zampanò, however, is inclined to agree with the view of the architectural

phenomenologist Christian Norberg-Schulz that, while it is true that architecture is experienced subjectively, it would be absurd to take too literally the suggestion that it comes into being only when experienced. As Norberg-Schulz says (on page 13 of *Existence, Space and Architecture*, according to Zampanò): "Architectural space certainly exists independently of the casual perceiver, and has centres and directions of its own" (171). But if the wall shifts are not simply projections of subjectivity (Navidson's or anyone else's) there must be another explanation for their fluidity; and to find it we must wean ourselves from Zampanò's exhaustive research.

The narrator of Lessing's *Memoirs* is left in no doubt that it is the house that is in charge, not her. Try as she may "to make the heavy solidity of the thing go down under the pressure of [her] will", her living-room wall allows her to pass only when she is wanted in the rooms beyond (Lessing 1974: 127). The Navidson house is similarly choosy. Feminist scholars consulted by Zampanò argue that Karen's reluctance to enter the hallway is the result of a female immunity to the attractions of architectural infiltration – an immunity that has always, I suggest, been widely assumed. In 1937, for example, the stegophile Noël "Whipplesnaith" Symington drew a very firm line between his band of "Cambridge Night Climbers" and those they left at home:

> When all is over, you will enjoy facing your bed-maker's cross-examination, replying to her queries by a bland look of innocence and a rather fatuous grin. You will bounce about with tremendous satisfaction, and feel more pleasure in living than you have ever known. The exaltation resulting from a difficult climb lasts for about three days, and during this time you will feel the devil of a fellow (Whipplesnaith 1937: 216).

In the introduction to a more recent manual of urban exploration, *Access All Areas* (2005), Jeff "Ninjalicious" Chapman, who describes buildering as "a thrilling, mind-expanding hobby that encourages our natural instincts to explore and play in our own environment", insists that it is an activity that does not, in these enlightened days, exclude women (Ninjalicious 2005: 3). On the contrary, he goes on, "a nice thing to bring along, if you can get one, is a girl" (16). Trespassing women come under less suspicion than trespassing men, partly because of their hygienic reputation ("Who would risk getting mud on that?"); and partly because "for most people, the idea of a woman deliberately going somewhere she's not supposed to be just doesn't make sense" (16-17). The theory that Karen Navidson's reluctance to enter the hallway is a result of a gender-specific aversion to trespass, however, is called into question when the children, while playing one afternoon, disappear into the hallway. While Navidson's

response is immediate – he plunges in after them – Karen "freezes on the threshold, unable to push herself into the darkness", despite her maternal fears (Danielewski: 57). This seems to be more "crippling claustrophobia" than inertia brought on by indifference to male proclivities. Zampanò, with customary diligence, looks into Karen's psychological history, and unearths a transcript of a televised talk show in which her estranged older sister disclosed that the fourteen-year-old Karen was forced down a well while she (the sister) was raped by her stepfather (347). Scholars of *The Navidson Record* have fallen upon this extravagant claim with enthusiasm but, as Zampanò conscientiously notes, Karen herself refuses to confirm its authenticity. And none of this explains why, towards the end of the novel, she enters the hallway without hesitation – simply because it *beckons her in*. Karen's claustrophobia, I suggest, is first induced, then later revoked, by the house itself.

Another character with a disabling spatial phobia is Tom Navidson. Initially thrilled to be one of the party that sets out to rescue Holloway's team, he baulks at the "profound depths" of the Spiral Staircase, and has to be left at its summit in charge of the radio (157). When Navidson and Reston fail to reappear, Tom decides to go down after them despite his vertigo, and it is then that the house resorts to aggression. Beaten back, first by violent stretchings and warpings of the staircase itself, then by the growl that is now so close it is "almost deafening", he is forced to retreat to the living room (273). Having denied Tom access, though, the house is positively hospitable to Navidson and Reston, who is paralysed below the waist. The staircase "collapses like an accordion" at their approach, so that it takes them five minutes to make a descent that took Holloway four days, then maintains its dimensions to allow Tom and Karen (after the Holloway debacle) to rescue Reston and wheelchair by means of a rope and pulley (164). The house, however, is not yet ready to let Navidson go. When Reston is safe, it abruptly drops the staircase, leaving Navidson "an impossible distance down"; then, for two days, it elongates its corridors and throws up dead ends to obstruct his escape (305). "'To tell you the truth'", Navidson later tells the camera, "'I was never sure I was going to make it until I finally did'" (323). Far from simply responding to human mood, I suggest, the house is, like Lessing's, controlling access; and at this point, for reasons not yet clear, it wants to keep Navidson inside, and everyone else out.

The house is every bit as fussy about objects as it is about personnel. The explorers' buttons, Velcro fastenings, shoe laces and backpack frames disintegrate in the hallway with unnatural speed, and Navidson calculates that even the strongest of

the various types of fishing line used to mark their path lasts only six days before being absorbed, or perhaps consumed. The house is more tolerant of objects above ground, but even here Karen's feng shui crystals, bullfrogs, goldfish and dragons begin systematically to vanish in a hyper-minimalist project that defies celebrations of "the house as container" such as Perec's novel *Life, A User's Manual* (1978). Perec's narrator never tires of listing every object, fixture and fitting to be found in 11, rue Simon-Crubellier; and, when he has exhausted its rooms, he sends his fancy underground:

> Sometimes he imagined the building as an iceberg whose visible tip included the main floors and eaves and whose submerged mass began below the first level of cellars: stairs with resounding steps going down in spirals; long tiled corridors, their luminous globes encased in wire netting, their iron doors stencilled with warnings and skulls; goods lifts with riveted walls, air vents equipped with huge, motionless fans; metal-lined canvas fire hoses as thick as tree trunks, connected to yellow stopcocks a yard in diameter […] Lower down there would come a gasping of machinery […] Narrow conduits would debouch on vast enclosed spaces – on subterranean halls high as cathedrals, their vaults clustered with chains, pulleys, cables, pipes, conduits, joists, with movable platforms attached to jacks bright with grease, with frames of tubing and steel sections that formed gigantic scaffoldings […etc.] (Perec 1978: 358-9).

The Navidson house, on the other hand, is having none of this. The twenty-four-page "footnote 144" (which, in Fordham's words, "occupies a kind of shaft which has been drilled through the central text" (Fordham 2011: 49)) is a Perec-ian list of everything the house does *not* contain:

> Not only are there no hot-air registers, return air vents, or radiators, cast iron or other, or cooling systems – condenser, reheat coils, heating convector, damper, concentrator, dilute solution, heat exchanger, absorber, evaporator, solution pump, evaporator recirculating pump – or any type of ducts, whether spiral lock-seam/standing rib design, double-wall duct, and Loloss TM Tee, flat oval, or round duct with perforated inner liner, insulation, and outer shell; no HVAC system at all, even a crude air distribution system – there are no windows – no water supplies, […etc.] (Danielewski 2000: 119-143).

Fixtures and fittings are banished by the hallway, along with trespassers and architectural influences, and writing is similarly scorned. The smooth, blank, walls allow none of Perec's stencilled warnings, nor any wallpaper, paint, graffiti, or pictures of any kind. Navidson's plan of Exploration A is inexplicably shredded, and Holloway's neon marks are quickly erased. "You will never find a mark there", writes Zampanò: "No trace survives. The walls obliterate everything. They are permanently absolved of all record. Oblique, forever obscure and unwritten. Behold the perfect

pantheon of absence" (423). A Princeton literature professor consulted by Karen suggests that what haunts her house is "'a very mean house keeper, who vigilantly makes sure the house remains void of absolutely everything. Not even a speck of dust. It's a maid gone absolutely nutso'", and he is not far wrong (357). The presence that haunts the Navidson house is female, like the one that haunts Lessing's; and, like her, she likes rooms to be swept, and kept clear of impediment. Perhaps not so nutso, she is clearing the decks, in readiness for redemption.

Once it has got past its bad-tempered dedication ("This is not for you"), *House of Leaves* is considerably more hospitable than the hallway it harbours. It accommodates all forms of writing, including Morse, Braille, algebra and musical notation; it excludes no theoretical perspective (despite the "editors"' uncharitable remarks); it tolerates constant digression, critical bickering, and interference from other authors ("Paul Auster" and "Donna Tartt" offer their advice, for example, as well as "Stephen King"); it welcomes footnotes, endnotes, bibliographies and indexes without quibbling about their position in the text, and it is not at all fussy about font, language, or how many lines there are to a page (522). It is as retentive as the hallway is purgative, and the explanation is its inexperienced editor. Johnny Truant frequently apologises that we have been saddled with an apprentice tattoo artist, as opposed to one of "the "numerous people who would have been better qualified to handle this work, scholars with PhDs from Ivy League schools and minds greater than any Alexandrian Library or World Net" (xx). Having happened upon Zampanò's commentary while accompanying a friend to the apartment of a deceased elderly neighbour, however, he could not but respond to its siren call. Securely contained in a large black trunk, as though to protect it from the hallway's decluttering excesses, it is unruly writing, which shows no respect for margin. It takes Johnny eight months to sort and collate the scraps of paper, napkins, envelopes and postage stamps that are "completely covered with the creep of years and years of ink pronouncements; layered, crossed out, amended; handwritten, typed; legible, illegible; impenetrable, lucid; torn, stained [and] scotch taped" (xvii). Initially his reading is desultory. He "graz[es] over the scenes, the names", and makes what "small connections" and "minor patterns" he can in the "slivers of time" he can spare between work and an active sex life (xviii). But one evening he looks at his clock to find seven hours have passed, and recognises that interpreting Zampanò is no longer a hobby.

When Rachel Lichtenstein involved herself in the search for "the man who became a room" – the recluse to whose disappearance she had been alerted by the psychogeographer Iain Sinclair – she became similarly obsessed (Lichtenstein and Sinclair 1999: 55). David Rodinsky, like Zampanò, was a reclusive graphomaniac whose "scribblings, quotations, scraps of verse, [and] stumbling translations" spread from his Lett's Schoolgirl's Diary to cigarette packets, old newspapers, furniture, wallpaper, and even the keys of his piano (6). But Lichtenstein had an easier job, I suggest, than Danielewski's Johnny Truant. She describes herself as a "revealer of [Rodinsky's] history"; an excavator of the "doctored autobiography" that was his room, and she never doubts that the clues he has left will lead her to solve the riddle of his disappearance (72, 189). Zampanò, on the other hand, has left few clues to his history, and those he has are patently suspect. "He call[s] himself Zampanò", but there is something fishy about a name invented by an Italian film director for an itinerant entertainer, and he cannot possibly have seen Navidson's film – partly because he is blind, and partly because it does not exist (Danielewski 2000: xii). The house on Ash Tree Lane does not exist either, or at least Johnny fails to find it, and he admits that "most of what's said by famous people has been made up. I tried contacting all of them. Those that took the time to respond told me they had never heard of Will Navidson let alone Zampanò" (xx). Johnny feels compelled to read "this arcane, obtuse and way over-the-top wanna-be scholarship", however, despite its dubious authenticity (249). The "endless snarls of words, sometimes twisting into meaning, sometimes into nothing at all, frequently breaking apart, [and] always branching off into other pieces", are as mesmerising as Gilman's wallpaper and Peter Wilmot's hieroglyphs, and even more dangerous (xvii):

> Fragmenting like artillery shells. Shrapnel, like syllables, flying everywhere.
> Terrible syllables. Sharp. Cracked. Traveling at murderous speed […]
> slamming, no banging into the thin wall of my inner ear, paper thin in fact,
> attempting to shatter inside what had already been shattered long ago (71).

For this is not the first time Johnny has found himself under verbal fire. He was too young to understand that the words "orbiting around [his] mother" during his early childhood ("auditory hallucinations", "verbigeration", "word salad", "derealization", "depersonalisation") signified a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, but he understood that the letters she later sent him from "The Whale" (as the Whalestoe Institute was popularly known) were "leaves of feeling" that he was required to interpret (379, 350).

Full of "strange colored words", and sometimes written in code to evade the staff she believed were censoring them, Pelafina Lièvre's letters explained the scars that still bedaub his body, and disclosed the attempted infanticide that led to her institutionalisation (380). The words were palliative, though, as well as confessional. By "tenderly catching my history" and "encouraging and focusing my direction" they empowered him to flee an abusive foster father (325). And if Pelafina's words, written from inside The Whale (its name ringing with biblical, Melvillean and Orwellian overtones), were then penetrative enough to breach its walls, it does not seem impossible that they would now find a way of reaching Johnny, from beyond the grave.

Using Zampanò as medium, and the hallway as habitat and redemptive conduit, Pelafina is both Navidson's house-proud ghost and *House of Leaves'*s spectral editor. It takes Johnny a while, though, to discern her hovering "between the lines, between the letters, like a ghost in the mirror, a ghost in the wings" (502). Fastidiously resistant to haunting, he would sooner words kept within narrative bounds, and the trunkful of text (which looks "capable of anything, maybe even of slashing out, tearing up the floor, murdering Zampanò, murdering us, maybe even murdering you") increasingly terrifies him (xvii). Johnny's fear is not unfounded. He has never heard of Federico Fellini, but his readers, perhaps, have seen the Italian director's *La Strada* (1954), in which Zampanò, the itinerant strong man, announces to his audience that "if I fail at this task [breaking the chains that bind him] I could become blind". Something has blinded Danielewski's Zampanò, and something has killed him, and the chief suspect is his work on the house on Ash Tree Lane. Johnny attaches measuring tape to his walls and floors to monitor encroachment from the Navidson void, but still the "empty hallways long past midnight" "slice" through him as they did the old man (49). Tormented by darkness and shadows, when he is doused in black ink during a panic attack in the tattoo parlour he watches his hand, then his body vanish in a horrific "dissolution of self" (72) like the "huge yawn" that engulfs H.G. Wells's invisible man (Wells 1897: 11). At the point of succumbing to annihilation, though, he is rescued by splashes of purple ink among the black, that "grant contrast", "define" him, "mark" him, and "at least for the moment preserv[e him]" (Danielewski 2000: 72). There are other blots, though, and they have a more lasting effect. Johnny restores every "minotaur" reference inked out by Zampanò, but there is no bringing back forty pages excised by a leaking bottle of "4001 *brillant-schwarz*" German ink (376). The sentence preceding this catastrophic erasure gives a clue to its content:

> Based on the evidence, sample A thru sample **XXXX** appear to make up an exact chronological map, which though simple, nevertheless still shows that……
> ……. [etc].

In a triumph of the supernatural over science, Navidson's hallway has swallowed his wall data.

It is an act of benevolent censorship, without which Navidson's redemption cannot begin. Data is one of a range of devices which, like *Jealousy*'s narrator, he is using to contain the world, and distance himself from it. Another is his arsenal of cameras. He has developed a "habit of photographic seeing", as described by Susan Sontag (and quoted by Zampanò): of apprehending reality "as an array of potential photographs" (418). His job is to frame moments of extremity, and it is a job in which he has always excelled. But while a photograph of the electrocution that permanently disabled Reston hangs proudly in his office, the Pulitzer Prize-winner is hidden in a box in the New York apartment. The "editors" quote, in a footnote, the censorious response of "the Florida *St Petersburg Times*" to the image of a five-year-old Sudanese child dying of starvation while stalked by a vulture: "The man adjusting his lens to take just the right frame of her suffering might just as well be a predator, another vulture on the scene" (368). In a metafictional twist, it is an exact transcript of the response of the actual Florida *St Petersburg Times* to Kevin Carter's Pulitzer-winning "Struggling Girl, Sudan" (1993). A psychologist interviewed by Zampanò voices the question all photojournalists must ask of themselves: "'Why aren't I doing something about this instead of just photographing it?'" (394). While the real Carter committed suicide in 1994, the fictional Navidson secretly named the child "Delial", squirrelled the photograph away, and hid his intolerable sorrow from his wife. And this, in the first of a series of denouements, is a wound his ghost seeks to heal.

Having apparently lost interest in the Navidson children (presumably while preoccupied with the fanatics exploring its bowels) the house, one afternoon when Karen is packing to leave, threatens to swallow the five-year-old Daisy. Claustrophobic shock prevents Karen from responding to the child's distant screams, but Tom Navidson finds her in the inexplicable closet, sweeps her into his arms, and runs for the door (345). The cameras record the subsequent architectural retaliation:

> The whole place keeps shuddering and shaking, walls cracking only to melt back together again, floors fragmenting and buckling, the ceiling suddenly rent

> by invisible claws, causing moldings to splinter, water pipes to rupture, electrical wires to spit and short out. Worse, the black ash of below spreads like printer's ink over everything, transforming each corner, closet, and corridor into that awful dark.

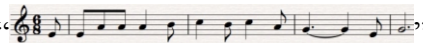
Not for the first time, the house is displeased with Tom. It is not *his* valour it wants. Then, as the floor fails, and man and child are dragged back towards "the void yawning up behind them", Navidson appears at the window. The expendable brother is swallowed, but not before he successfully passes Daisy out to her father who, "despite the fragments of glass scratching long bloody lines along his forearms, immediately rips her free of the house and into safety". He has succeeded with Daisy where he failed with Delial, and delivered her through the frame.

Navidson must make one final solo expedition, however, to complete his redemption. His decision to return to the house that devoured his brother is ludicrously over-researched by "Kellog-Antwerk", "Bister-Frieden-Josephson", "Haven-Slocum" and "Deacon Lookner", who respectively conclude his motive is territorial, penitential, lycophilic and photojournalistic. But if we again bypass the academics, and look at what the cameras "actually" show, we see that the house, true to form, *is drawing him in*. Pedalling the mountain bike (necessary because his baggage includes food and water, survival equipment, photographic gear and "one book") proves unexpectedly easy; then altogether unnecessary; and finally he can do nothing but brake (424). The hallway is in protean mode, and Navidson, Alice-like, is first constricted, then dwarfed by its rooms. After a while the walls recede, then vanish, and the ceiling "lifts until it too is completely out of sight" (432). When the floor also drops it takes his clutter with it, leaving behind a sleeping bag, a box of matches, and the book. Marooned on "an ashblack slab, apparently supported by nothing", Navidson climbs into the sleeping bag and reads, match by match, the only piece of writing his house has permitted on the premises: an earlier edition of *House of Leaves* (464). When he has read the last page (which he burns to read, with the last match) the slab drops, Navidson falls, the picture fails, and for six minutes we listen to his sobs while the projector "spew[s] out darkness" at an "implacable screen" (468).

There are a number of texts, I suggest, "hovering in the wings" of *House of Leaves*, which are unacknowledged in its copious footnotes. I have mentioned Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher", and here, I believe, is another. When Danielewski's house of leaves disintegrates, Navidson is abandoned by both architecture and writing;

and the floating consciousness that remains bears striking resemblance to Samuel Beckett's narrator in the final lines of "The Unnamable" (1953):

> … silence, full of murmurs, I don't know, that's all words, never wake, all words, there's nothing else, you must go on, that's all I know, they're going to stop, I know that well, I can feel it, they're going to abandon me, it will be the silence, for a moment, a good few moments, or it will be mine, the lasting one, that didn't last, that still lasts, it will be I, you must go on, I can't go on, you must go on, I'll go on, you must say words, as long as there are any, until they find me, until they say me, strange pain, strange sin, you must go on, perhaps it's done already, perhaps they have said me already, perhaps they have carried me to the threshold of my story, before the door that opens on my story, that would surprise me, if it opens, it will be I, it will be the silence, where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on (Beckett 1953: 407).

Where Navidson differs from the unnameable, however, is that there is light at the end of the tunnel. As we watch the "implacable screen", the sobbing suddenly stops; and, apparently accustomed to falling, Navidson seems to revive. We hear him mumble "'I have no sense of anything other than myself'"; then sing a snatch of The Beatles's "Help" ("Now I find I changed my mind and opened up the door …") – a song that bears no relation to the tune that follows it ("  ") – which is a fragment of the Civil War song "When Johnny Comes Marching Home" (Danielewski 2000: 476-9). Fordham's argument that *The Navidson Record* and Johnny's narrative are parallel *katabases* is fascinating and persuasive. I think he is wrong, however, to claim that the two narratives never converge. What he misses (along with Zampanò, his army of critics and the novel's disdainful "editors") is the journey Navidson makes between the solipsistic utterance, the interim lyric, and the salutatory melody. The "compulsion for connectivity" that Fordham finds in Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), I would argue, is every bit as strong in *House of Leaves* (Fordham 2011: 44). If Beckett's unnameable were to open the door to his narrative he would reveal nothing but "I". Navidson, however, opens the door to *his*, and Johnny comes marching in.

Like the loft in Camus's "Jonas", the Navidson hallway is a space of retreat and enlightenment. It is also, crucially, temporary. What Camus wants for Jonas, ultimately, is connection with the world. He wants to see him out there, contributing to the "lovely murmur of humanity" (Camus 1957: 79). Danielewski wants the same, I believe, both for his protagonists and for his readers. In an interview with Kiki Benzon in 2007 he described the recently published *Only Revolutions* (2006) as a "centrifugal" novel,

"about getting outside", and *House of Leaves* as a "centripetal" novel, "about interiorities and history and progeny and ancestors" (Benzon and Danielewski 2007). While "centripetal" seems a reasonable adjective for the novel's *subject* – a guzzling, infinitely expanding labyrinth that opens up inside a commonplace rural house – it seems to me that the *drive* of *House of Leaves*, like that of "Jonas", is, actually, essentially centrifugal. The reader is constantly directed outside the novel to the real world (actual books, buildings, films and photographs), and also to the virtual world. The "houseofleaves" website, for example, which is advertised several times in the peritext, redirects the reader straight to the MZD (Mark Z. Danielewski) forums. There is overt intertextuality, as Mel Evans convincingly demonstrates in her essay "This Haunted House" (2011), between *House of Leaves* and *Haunted*, the album released simultaneously by Danielewski's sister; and the novel concludes not with the ash-walled house, but with an immense ash tree (Evans 2011: 68-85). "*Yggdrasil*", the final page reads: "What miracle is this? This giant tree. It stands ten thousand feet high but does not reach the ground. Still it stands. Its roots must hold the sky" (Danielewski 2000: 709). This is the tree of Norse mythology that connects the nine worlds of the cosmos, and its presence decisively confirms the novel's opposition to Holloway's crazed quest for a centre. *House of Leaves* wants its protagonists to "get outside", to branch out, to connect with the world, and with each other. "'If you want my opinion, you just need to get out of the house'", is the stripper's advice to Johnny, and it is advice he eventually heeds (106). At about the same time as Navidson embarks on Exploration #5, Johnny emerges from the room he has sealed with duct tape and multiple locks, and heads for Virginia.

Johnny fails to find the house on Ash Tree Lane, but he does connect with Navidson. While Navidson strikes matches (to read) on his ash-black slab, Johnny strikes matches (for warmth) in his squalid Virginian hotel. While Navidson, falling, remarks that he has "no sense of anything other than [him]self", Johnny writes in his diary: "an incredible loneliness has settled inside me. I've never felt anything like this before" (493). While Navidson sings: "Now I find I changed my mind and opened up the door …", Johnny writes: "And I find it. What has been there all along […] primitive and pitiless […] I let it stretch inside me like an endless hallway. And then I open the door. I'm not afraid any more" (494). In a seedy bar he hears the song "5½-Minute Hallway", which *he* recognises as the title of *The Navidson Record*'s trailer, and *we*

recognise as a track from "Poe" Danielewski's *Haunted*. It triggers a memory of the five and a half minutes it took for his father to catch his mother in the act of choking him, and for her to be "swallowed by The Whale where authorities thought it unwise to let him see her" (517). Five and a half minutes was the length of his father's "roar of intervention" ("an ear shattering, nearly inhuman shout, unleashed to protect me, to stop her and cover me, when I was four"), and also of Pelafina's "scream" as she was wrenched from him: "The roar, the one I've been remembering, in the end not a roar, but the saddest call of all – reaching for me, her voice sounding as if it would shatter the world, fill it with thunder and darkness, which I guess it finally did" (630, 506, 517). The hallway is personal history, like Lessing's alternative house, and when he allows it to "stretch inside" him Johnny also ushers in the "growl" that pervades it. It is, it transpires, the howl of a mother torn from her child.

Users of the MZD forums worry a great deal about the apparent lack of conclusion to Johnny's narrative. "Whatever happened to Johnny????????", asks "Athena_in_black", for example, to which "hello?" replies:

> Chronologically the last entry Johnny makes is … uh, I forget … I think it's November, 1999, but maybe not. Anyway, it's when he goes to Flagstaff and hears the band playing 'Five and a Half Minute Hallway'. He ends up sleeping under an ash tree, telling himself it's going to be alright several times … I'm not usually an optimist, but I'd like to think that poor ol' Johnny's suffered enough and that, in the end, he can finally rest. Everything's going to be alright. The tone of that particular passage seems rather serene, almost dreamlike. It doesn't seem like Mark is trying to say it's *not* going to be alright […] Oh, I should probably mention that I also think Johnny's end should remain open ended. What I wrote up there was just what I wanted to happen, I guess… ("Athena_in_black" and "hello?" 09-30-2001, 02:24 PM – 02:32 PM)

"hello?" has good grounds for optimism, I believe, though he fails to identify them. Johnny's narrative does not simply peter out; it fuses with Navidson's – and Navidson is soon to be rescued. Karen, like Johnny, has "begun her slow turn to face the meaning, or at least one meaning, of the darkness dwelling in the depths of her house" – a meaning she must confront if the reconciliation that was the object of her move to Virginia is ever to be effected (Danielewski 2000: 316). Her reliance on cameras is as damaging as Navidson's: it creates a barrier between herself and the world, and also a fissure between herself and her husband. Tired of being the object of the photographic gaze, she has relished the opportunity to step the other side of the viewfinder. As Mark Hansen points out, in a chapter on *House of Leaves*'s digital topography in *Bodies in Code* (2006), there comes a point when the Navidsons communicate better through their

video diaries than they do face-to-face (Hansen 2006: 234). They need to be rescued from their own cameras. The hallway stripped Navidson of his photographic equipment before his epiphanic fall, and now Karen's rescuer, rather improbably, is "Derrida". Interviewed for "What Some Have Thought", "the French philosopher" responds to Karen's question about the nature of the house with his customary impenetrability: "Well that which is inside, which is to say, if I may say, that which infinitely patterns itself without the outside, without the other, though where then is the other?" (Danielewski 2000: 361). But then, as the camera continues to roll, he asks: "Finished? Good. [Pause] Hold my hand. We stroll". "Derrida"'s instinct is that of the stripper when she advises Johnny to get out of the house. Karen will feel so much better if she steps away from the camera, and engages with the world.

The Navidson Record needs a conclusion, however, and when Karen returns to Ash Tree Lane she does not fail to activate the Hi 8 cameras. The house has quieted since it swallowed Navidson, and its alien spaces have, for the time being, dispersed. Karen knows Navidson should be there – his car is in the drive – but she seems untroubled by his absence. Research unearthed by Zampanò proves that during this period her faultless smile (contrived for *Glamour* and *Vogue* and later "deconstructed" by her house) becomes "completely unmannered"; "no longer a frozen structure but a melody which for the first time accurately reflected how she was feeling inside" (416). Released from the photographic frame, she "fills the house with peals of laughter" as she gets on with the "toothpaste and gardening" that the couple have always planned. It is while she is gardening, indeed, that the cameras show her singing Slavic lullabies, and "a song about how many ways her life has changed and how she would like to get her feet back on the ground". It is "Help" again, and again Zampanò has missed it. The Navidsons, it seems, are evading his commentary, and communicating at last. Karen does not retreat when the closet yawns once more between the bedrooms, though she stands for several minutes on its brink; and, when she steps inside, "she takes no deep breath and makes no announcement. She just steps forward and disappears behind the black curtain" (522). Zampanò eventually abandons the critical speculation he has amassed as to how she has overcome her claustrophobia to describe how, "regardless of what finally enabled her to walk across that threshold, forty-nine minutes later a neighbour saw Karen crying on the front lawn, a pink ribbon in her hair, Navidson cradled in her lap" (523).

Zampanò is not privy to the letters that the "editors" include (with some resistance from Johnny) in this "second edition" of *House of Leaves*. It is up to us to tie the pink ribbon to Pelafina, who wrote to her son from inside The Whale: "Once again you've turned your mother into a silly school girl. Like Hawthorne's Faith, I put pink ribbons in my hair and subject everyone here […] to a complete account of your prodigious accomplishments" (599). The pink ribbon is the one lost by the wife of Nathaniel Hawthorne's Young Goodman Brown to the witches of Salem (Hawthorne 1835: 112). It has been returned, via Pelafina, to Karen, to facilitate the salvation of a husband. Karen is later interviewed about the rescue, by a student journalist:

> Q: How did you get him out of the house?
> Karen: It just dissolved.
> Q: Dissolved? What do you mean?
> Karen: Like a bad dream. We were in pitch blackness and then I saw, no … actually my eyes were closed. I felt this warm, sweet air on my face, and then I opened my eyes and I could see trees and grass. I thought to myself, 'We've died. We've died and this is where you go after you die'. But it turned out to be just our front yard.
> Q: You're saying the house dissolved?
> Karen: [No response]
> Q: How's that possible? It's still there, isn't it?
> END OF INTERVIEW (Danielewski 2000: 524-5).

In an interview for *Flak Magazine* Danielewski tells of an encounter with a reader in a bookshop, who said: "'You know, everyone told me it was a horror book, but when I finished it, I realized that it was a love story'" (Wittmershaus and Danielewski 2006). "And she's absolutely right", says Danielewski: "In some ways, genre is a marketing tool". *House of Leaves* concludes with an architectural implosion for the same reason that *The Memoirs of a Survivor* does. Once Pelafina has merged with Karen, and Johnny with Navidson, the hallway is surplus to requirements. The reconciliation is complete, and a Virginian paradise regained.

Writing, in Palahniuk's *Diary*, proves more potent than either building or book. By the end of the novel the messages inscribed on Peter Wilmot's walls have been entirely consumed by fire, but the eponymous diary has survived … and has been sent directly from protagonist to author. By including Misty's covering letter ("Dear Mr Palahniuk") in the novel, Palahniuk ensures it performs the same function as Gilman's "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'": it is a reminder that the diary has escaped the attic room in which it was written (Palahniuk 2003: 261). However "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper'", which was published in "The Forerunner" in 1913 and

subsequently included by most publishers with the story, has always respected its textual boundaries (Gilman 1913: 398-9). "Dear Mr Palahniuk", on the other hand, has succeeded in seeping through the formerly imporous membrane between text and paratext; and *House of Leaves*, I suggest, goes one step further. In this case it is the novel itself that is consumed by fire; and, when the house also dissipates, there is nothing left but the paratext. The multiplicity of texts Danielewski martials – both architectural and fictional – is testament to one of his intentions in the novel: to stage a final, millennium-ending interdisciplinary battle between architecture and writing. And Danielewski, like Doris Lessing before him, is not convinced of the superiority of either discipline. When Lessing annihilates architecture at the end of *The Memoirs of a Survivor*, her mystic deity presides over the creation of "another order of world altogether": a new, inclusive "order", which renounces binary opposition, and simultaneously protects her protagonists against any ensuing agoraphobic panic (Lessing 1974: 182). So radical a utopia is it, however, that it cannot be captured by the novel. There is nothing but a blank page to follow "as the last walls dissolved", its final phrase. Architecture loses its bearings without binarism to support it, but then so too does language; and by the close of the twentieth century the author increasingly looks forward to a deliverance from all structure – textual as well as architectural. Ultimately Danielewski's house, like Lessing's, "just dissolve[s]", and its "leaves" are incinerated (Danielewski 2000: 524). As for the world that remains, it is, like Lessing's, one in which it may be possible for man to *be*, and to *love*, outside the dichotomous categories to which writing, as well as architecture, has so long held him in thrall.

Conclusion

The married couple, at odds in a house, is a trope considered in the first and last chapters of this thesis, and also, at intervals, elsewhere. One function of a house is to effect the purpose of marriage: to detach a couple from the world, and then to maintain its privacy. It is the former function to which, as was pointed out in the introduction to Chapter 1, its *fin-de-siècle* detractors most object. "A strangling cradle", Charlotte Perkins Gilman brands it in *Women and Economics* (Gilman 1898: 267); and in "Zoological Regression" H.G. Wells denounces it as an encumbrance of "inorganic and servile material", which is "secreted" by a man when he ill-advisedly relinquishes his youth and single status (Wells 1891: 162-3). "Inorganic" and "servile", as my first chapter demonstrated, would not be fitting epithets for the house as it appears in *fin-de-siècle* fiction. The two houses in Edith Wharton's "The Reckoning", for example, are acutely sensitive, formidably partisan, and (although one purports to accommodate "new" marriage, and one "old") equally conservative. They respond to breaches of social code by sprouting unwanted ornaments from plainly painted walls, by unseating miscreants from hitherto stable chairs, and, if necessary, by evicting them from the premises. The house in Mona Caird's "The Yellow Drawing Room" is similarly inhospitable, when it feels it has been inappropriately decorated; and houses in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* glower at their occupants to remind them to conform to marital orthodoxy. The *fin-de-siècle* house considers it its duty to shore up social structures, and to punish those who dare to meddle with them. It protects the polite, and excludes the disobedient. Implacably aligned with the nineteenth century, it has no wish to be modernised.

In the course of my research it became clear that architectural organicism, at other points in the century, varies with the author's agenda. Apartment blocks that can be moulded and controlled by virile architects in Ayn Rand's New York, for example, to demonstrate the soundness of Truslow Adams's American Dream, are allowed to crush, hobble or swallow their occupants in Ann Petry's New York, to demonstrate its spuriousness; and the anachronistically unyielding houses of Doris Lessing's "personal" realm, which overwhelm and overheat the nuclear families they contain, are swept away to make room for more flexible houses, which accommodate alternative, communal ways of living. Mark Z. Danielewski's house is a sentient structure, like

Wharton's, which registers flaws in the marriage it contains; and, like Wharton's, it shows no sign of servility. It decides who will be allowed to inhabit it, and what can be displayed on its walls. What it refuses to guarantee, however, is the volumes of space those walls can be expected to contain. Unlike Wharton's houses, its purpose is not to uphold structure, but rather to relinquish it; not to shackle its occupants to a dying century, but rather to usher them into a new one. For Alain Robbe-Grillet, on the other hand, the job of the "new" novelist is very specifically to avoid anthropomorphising the external world – an external world which, presumably, includes architecture. The bungalow in *Jealousy*, therefore, shows no sign of sentience. It is *only* present, as I argued in Chapter 4, although it is as much a field of marital battle as Wharton's houses. If the jealous man is to corroborate his conjectures, and outwit his wife and her lover, he must take account of the walls that cut off his view and compromise his hearing. The walls themselves, however, are entirely inert. The "necessity" that gives form to "possibility", they can provide external justification for his beliefs and fantasies, but that is all that they can do. Man lives, and acts upon the world, but architecture does not.

The second chapter considered another trope of twentieth-century fiction – the man or woman confined to a room – and found that it is the room in its metaphysical aspect, rather than its social one, that is of particular appeal to the modernist author. External reality is shut out, in these texts, and interior reality foregrounded, partly to interrogate the assumptions of nineteenth-century literary realism, and partly to explore issues of twentieth-century alienation. Walls are twinned with skulls, shells and skin, as membranes that limit the infinite; and windows are placed as reminders (usually ignored) of the world's importunate demands. Henri Barbusse holes a wall between one room and the next, as a tempting offer of respite from the "cold otherness of being" (Lawrence 1915: 410). Ultimately, though – at least at this point in the century – there is no bridging the tragic gap between self and other: at the end of the novel Barbusse's voyeur is obliged to seal the breach, and embrace the solipsism he had always intended to escape. Even when someone else has actually locked the door (as is the case in "The Yellow Wallpaper", for example, and *The Metamorphosis*), the protagonists of these texts seem willingly to have withdrawn from the world, and my research has found that retreat, for the twentieth-century protagonist, continues to be an attractive option. Sometimes the impulse is fed by a horror of the formlessness of external reality: a horror of the crowd conceived as undifferentiated mass, as experienced by some of *The*

Fountainhead's characters, or of matter conceived as undifferentiated mess, as experienced by the narrator of *Jealousy*. Sometimes it is fed by the desire of the spy (or traitor) to escape notice (for Elizabeth Bowen's Robert Kelway, for example, the skull and the blacked-out room are equally effective "hermetic world[s]"), and sometimes by the desire of the outsider to shore up a sense of being (Nettie Morris, for example, sits with her back to the window to feel "her own existence […] condensing around her in pure drops") (Bowen 1949: 90, 215). Sometimes, as with Albert Camus's beleaguered artist, retreat provides relief from a world without meaning; and sometimes, as with the occupants of J.G. Ballard's high-rise, it provides relief from a world without relevance. Then again sometimes, as in Chuck Palahniuk's island hotel, it simply places a comforting barrier between "insiders" and "outsiders". Marshall Berman describes the experience of modernity as "the thrill and the dread of a world in which 'all that is solid melts into air'", and these protagonists feel only the dread (Berman 1982: 13). Terrified by any sign of the collapse of a coherent identity, they cleave to architecture, cling to furniture, and recoil from windows, doors, or any kind of hole. Their response to Berman's "maelstrom of modern life" is the nervous pursuit of enclosure (16).

There are, on the other hand, other twentieth-century protagonists (Sue Bridehead in *Jude*, for example, Dominique Francon in *The Fountainhead*, and Stella Rodney and Louie Lewis in *The Heat of the Day*) who are as attracted by formlessness and fluidity as the agoraphobes are appalled: who shrink from contact with either flesh or architecture, and "thrill" at the prospect of total immersion in empty space. This craving for material dissolution, though, is shown to be as disordered as its obverse. It is unsafe, even suicidal. Walls can be tiresome, but they have their uses, and protagonists risk being cast out if they renounce them. The trope that informed the title of my third chapter is used by Sigfried Giedion in more than one of his seminal works, and also by Friedrich Nietzsche, Le Corbusier, Ayn Rand, Albert Camus, and others, to express the quest for the elusive point of equilibrium between the self and the modern world. The tightrope walker Giedion summons is a "man in equipoise" who heals the rifts – historical and spatial – that blight the "distorted period" that is the twentieth century (Giedion 1948: 720). To achieve this feat, says Giedion, the tightrope walker must resist any inclination to focus on interior reality at the expense of exterior reality, or vice versa; and resist, too, the aggressively demarcated division between past and future. He must balance the conflicting impulses that Berman associates with the

modern sensibility, and step forward into the new century without losing what is valuable from the old.

The trope prompted me to focus on those fictional characters who seem to find an equilibrium between inner and outer reality: who get through the century without walling themselves up, or throwing themselves, vertiginously, into infinite space (or both in succession). Their survival, I argued, cannot be disassociated from a certain metaphysical stance. I considered Steven Connor's suggestion, in "Man is a Rope", that successful tightrope walkers are "not heroes but clowns, who offer better company, seem better, as the Americans say, to hang with", and acknowledged that the composure of my literary tightrope walkers seems to derive more from insouciance than courage (Connor 2008). Twentieth-century fiction is strewn with the corpses of those who fail to make their peace with architecture – who pathologically dither between clinging to walls and running from them, reinforcing them and breaching them, stripping them and interpreting them – and who, as a consequence, fail to make the transition (to use Berman's terminology) from "modern" to "modernist" (Berman 1982: 345-6). The survivors I identified, on the other hand, step out into the world with no sign of discomfort, and the explanation for their composure seems to be their relaxed response to dissolving conceptual boundaries between self and world. Their skin is so much thicker than that of their contemporaries, and they care less about whether they are inside or out. They read less into walls; and, if they resist architecture at all, they do so with subtlety – making use of it, if it suits them, or evading it, if not. Walls, for them, are neither straitjackets nor blankets, nor surfaces to be interrogated. They step through doors, acknowledge windows, and retain or discard furniture, without anguish. They allow rooms to structure their being, but not to deny them access to the being of others. Taking advantage of any structural defects they find, they make contacts, collaborate, and participate in the world. They adapt to the modern world effortlessly, because they hold architecture in less awe.

My fourth chapter revisited the sedentary position adopted by Alice in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas* – "I like a view but I like to sit with my back turned to it" – and argued that it is a position that was increasingly problematised in twentieth-century fiction (Stein 1933: 7). A certain amount of cold-shouldering of the external universe is understandable, in the interests of surviving the modern maelstrom; and retreat – whether into a skull, room, house, high-rise, hotel or ivory tower – will always be tempting. We can think our own thoughts when we are walled

in. We can behave as we please; avoid notice, responsibility, and unpleasantness; and convince ourselves of our own significance. As a long-term strategy, however, it is rarely endorsed by twentieth-century fiction. In these texts the interior fails to nourish the human soul, and sitting alone in a room is shown to encourage a kind of myopic brooding – a relentless, fruitless over-reading – which drives the protagonist to the brink of insanity. And retreat is as unethical, in these texts, as it is unhealthy. While the hysterics, voyeurs, dreamers, traitors and house beetles seek solace in introspection and non-participation, history continues to rage behind their carefully locked doors. Sooner or later the snail on the wall must be named, brutal as it may seem to Woolf's narrator; and, along with her husband, news of the war must come crashing through the door. From Charlotte Perkins Gilman's material feminist stance, to Ann Petry's naturalist feminist one; and from Albert Camus's existential humanist stance, to Mark Z. Danielewski's post-postmodernist one, the practice of retreating behind walls (and/or skulls), to reflect on existence at the expense of "events", is shown to be unjustified, as well as unwise. Sometimes, these authors conclude, retreat is necessary for the soul, but only as a temporary measure. As a long-term human habitat the interior is no longer viable, or appropriate, and it is only those who are willing to emerge from it, and dip their toes in the modern maelstrom, that can hope for redemption. Ultimately these texts reject the "being versus world" paradigm, in favour of "being in the world".

It was an ethos of participation – of cheerful, chaotic cooperation – that Jane Jacobs promoted in her canonical critique of modernist architectural priorities, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*; and in his "gentle manifesto" for postmodern architecture Robert Venturi similarly championed the complex and contradictory when he privileged the "both-and" over the "either-or"; and the "black and white, and sometimes gray", over the "black or white" (Venturi 1966: 16). Postmodern architectural theory sought to blur the harsh lines of binarism, which they associated with the clean-cut slabs of Le Corbusier's radiant city. One of my conclusions is that the undermining of binary opposition was an objective of writers of fiction for some time before it was a concern for writers of architectural theory; and it was figured in the relationship between protagonist and architecture. When Petry's Mrs Hedges opens her window and actively participates in "the brawling, teeming, lusty life that roared past [it]" (Petry 1946: 251), she is anticipating Jacobs's communally-spirited "natural proprietors of the street" by over a decade (Jacobs 1961: 45). And it is a deconstructive impulse that drives the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" to tease out the significance

of the submerged text that lies suspended between the structure and surface of her attic room wall, a full century before Johnny Truant similarly unmasks his mother's text "between the lines, between the letters, like a ghost in the mirror, a ghost in the wings" of the House in Ash Tree Lane (Danielewski 2000: 502). Even Rand, despite her apparent admiration for the no-nonsense clarity of the skyscraper, eventually advocates (if only "down to a certain point") a loosening of the man/world divide (Rand 1943: 650).

But it is in post-war fiction that architecture itself begins to lose its power. Walls, in the texts analysed in the early part of this thesis, were sodden with convention, heavy with history, and blackened by the "whole hoard of human beings [who] have passed this way like smoke" (Barbusse 1908: 2). Protagonists had real *difficulty* getting round, or through, their stern materiality. But where Gilman's narrator, for example, had to shred wallpaper and dig through plaster with her bare hands, no tearing or piercing is required for Bowen's characters, as they step dazedly through walls that have lost their potency in a landscape which is unstable, permeable, and ephemeral. What I have argued, though, is that Bowen is not simply advocating the abandonment of architecture. *The Heat of the Day* ends with the traces of the foundations of the Lewises' bombed house, which seem to promise to mend the "broken edges" of the fissure between past and future that Stella Rodney has always felt "grating inside her soul" (Bowen 1949: 176). Bowen's project is to soften what Gaston Bachelard calls the "aggressivity" of all "dialectics of division" – inside and outside, as well as past and future – and she is not the only post-war writer to give this priority (Bachelard 1957: 212). Camus's thesis, in "Jonas", is that the twentieth-century artist has a particularly burdensome cross to bear: he is simultaneously in dispute with the world, and negotiating reconciliation. It is only by being walled up in his loft that Jonas is able to arrive at that crucial moment when he writes, in the middle of his blank canvas, a word which may be "independent" or "interdependent"; but he would not be able to reap the benefit of his epiphany, Camus makes it clear, were he to remain in his loft (Camus, "Jonas" 1957: 80). There is nothing to be done about a wooden partition between oneself and the world but to leave it there, or take it down, as Rateau the architect is in a good position to know. Walls, after all, are very literal forms. In the centre of the canvas, though, is the word which, in the original French, may be *solitaire* or *solidaire*, and in the centre of the word is that ambiguous letter – *t* or *d*. Writing has achieved what will always be impossible for architecture. Suspended between inside and outside

– between withdrawing and participating in the world – the *t/d* is the wild card: Derrida's *hymen*; Venturi's "both-and", and Giedion's tightrope. Keeping one's balance in the world is not about choosing between "exile" and "kingdom"; it is about embracing both.

The *jalousie,* or shuttered blind, allows *Jealousy's* narrator a great deal more control over exposure and concealment than the hole in his wall allowed the narrator of *Hell*. It enables him to command the middle ground between inside and outside, open and closed, visible and invisible. Unlike the ambiguous word that acts as a conduit between Jonas and the "lovely murmur of humanity" beyond his loft, however, it does not qualify as a *hymen*, which is a connective membrane. Robbe-Grillet's blind is always "tinged with aggressivity" (Bachelard 1957: 212). Its function is to outwit binarism, rather than to soften its edges, and thereby to outwit a straying wife. Ballard's *High-Rise*, as I argued in my fifth chapter, is a post-structuralist text which, like *Jealousy*, ultimately presides over the subversion of architecture; but, like *Jealousy*, it leaves the building standing. All structures, by the end of *High-Rise* – economic, social and cultural, as well as architectural – are empty shells, and form and function have completely lost their meaning. In the carcase of the high-rise, meanwhile, its deadly female occupants – the only ones to recognise the efficacy of cooperation – are poised to establish a new, gynocentric world. In the exhausted world of *The Memoirs of a Survivor* systems, structures and social patterns are similarly stultified, but Lessing offers a solution to her more diverse survivors. Architecture that has been thinning, flaking, fragmenting and dissolving, from the beginning of the novel, finally implodes in a big-bang moment which nullifies all anachronistic polarities, including male and female, old and young, city and country, birth and death, and in which the inside/outside dichotomy is completely reimagined.

In her essay "Architecture from the Outside" (2001), which explores the interface between architectural and philosophical discourse, Elizabeth Grosz argues that twentieth-century philosophers such as Derrida and Gilles Deleuze are not advocating the abandonment, or replacement, of "binarized thought", but are, rather, arguing for the playing of dichotomous categories against each other, "so that the possibilities of their reconnections, their realignment in different 'systems', are established" (Grosz 2001: 65-6). The boundary between inside and outside, therefore, and between self and other, and subject and object, "must not be regarded as a limit to be transgressed, so much as a boundary to be traversed". Twentieth-century fiction, I

am suggesting, has been similarly, and increasingly, intrigued by the possibility of play between dichotomous categories, of a realignment of ideas of inside and outside, and of traversing the boundaries between them; and it is this interest, I have concluded, that has prompted both the prevalence, and the nature, of the architectural trope. Twentieth-century architects can interrupt, dislocate and manipulate the *appearance* of inside and outside, but the actuality of the dichotomy is set in stone. Architecture is immune to deconstruction, and fiction is eager to point it out. Architecture is shown to be an encumbrance – as structure, discipline, and career path. Howard Roark is an exception, I would argue, even within *The Fountainhead*. Generally speaking, in twentieth-century fiction, men who work with buildings – architects, stonemasons, caretakers and builders – are not cast in the same clay. At best they are useful, but stolid and uncreative; and at worst they are hampered by architecture – held back, held down, fatally structure-bound. And actually, as I argued in Chapter 3, it is not Roark's authority and rationality that Rand most admires, but his balance.

The suggestion made in my final chapter, that *Diary* is a reworking of "The Yellow Wallpaper", was prompted partly by the conspicuousness of yellow wallpaper in the later text, and partly by the aggravating impenetrability, in both texts, of walls. Misty overcomes this impenetrability, where her *fin-de-siècle* predecessor failed, for two reasons: her husband introduces her to the pleasures of piercing, and his lover (whose name, tellingly, is "Delaporte") introduces her to the wonders of graphology. Writing possesses an agility, versatility, and guile with which architecture cannot hope to compete; and it is writing, ultimately, that enables Misty to overcome her anchoritic inclinations, and traverse the boundary between self and other, and self and world. In *House of Leaves* writing takes the ultimate step, of deconstructing itself. Joseph Hillis Miller has described deconstruction as "not a dismantling of the structure of a text, but a demonstration that is has already dismantled itself. Its apparently solid ground is no rock, but thin air" (Miller 1976: 330). When the last page of *House of Leaves* is consumed by fire, and all walls, floors and ceilings have retreated to leave Will Navidson first balanced on an "ash-black slab", then floating in a void, it is a deconstructive implosion; and the whistled tune that remains, when both house and leaves have dissipated, is another manifestation of Derrida's *hymen*. It connects Navidson with Truant, Navidson with Navidson, and both Navidsons with the world. Derrida himself, meanwhile, steps into the novel as a character, and gallantly leads Karen Navidson away from both camera lens and photographic frame. Frames and

screens, like centres, walls, pages and book covers, will be obsolete, the novel suggests, in the new world promised by the great, Norse connective tree *Yggdrasil*. Danielewski's Derrida, like Lessing's mystic deity, is leading his survivor to another way of being, beyond house and leaves, architecture and text.

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